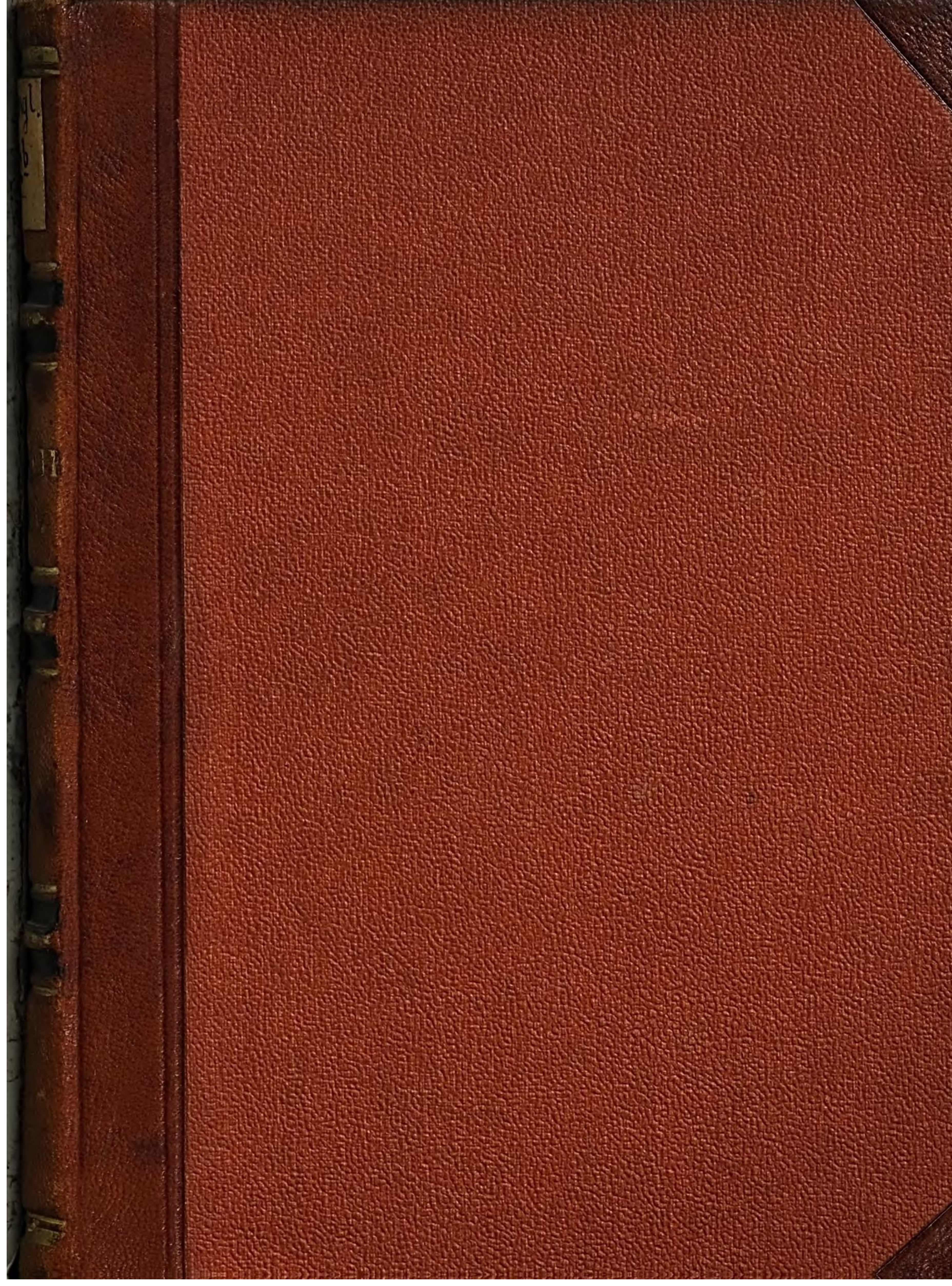




Aus der
Büchersammlung des Capitäns
Th. Dempster Gordon.
Geschenk des k. Forstrathes G. Dürig
an die k. Bibliothek.

L. angl. o 182⁶
T

COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 1514.

THE BOUDOIR CABAL BY TROIS-ETOILES.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

319

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

THE MEMBER FOR PARIS . . . 2 vols.
YOUNG BROWN 2 vols.

THE
BOUDOIR CABAL

BY

TROIS-ETOILES,

AUTHOR OF "THE MEMBER FOR PARIS," ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1875.

The Right of Translation is reserved.



TO
VICTOR HUGO

THE SUBLIME POET THE APOSTLE OF FREEDOM

THE GREAT PROSCRIPT

WHO SANCTIFIED THE SORROWS OF EXILE

BY HIS NOBLE FORTITUDE UNDER PERSECUTION

THIS BOOK IS HUMBLY DEDICATED

AS A TRIBUTE OF THE

DEEPEST RESPECT, ADMIRATION, AND FRIENDSHIP

BY

THE AUTHOR.

CONTENTS

O F V O L U M E I.

	Page
CHAPTER I. Introduces a promising Peer	9
— II. Sir Ham Pennywon	17
— III. In which Mr. Deedes does nothing	23
— IV. A Funeral and a Vignette	32
— V. Lady Rosemary	43
— VI. In which Lord Mayrose finds his Keynote	56
— VII. Zellie's Brother	69
— VIII. Mr. Paramount	76
— IX. In which Mary Pennywon receives a Camelia	85
— X. A Chapter of Accidents	97
— XI. A Noble Suitor	115
— XII. Lord Hornette's Tactics	122
— XIII. A General Election	135
— XIV. Mr. Abel Dexter	147
— XV. A Change of Ministry	155
— XVI. Sir Ham's Partner	168
— XVII. Miss Pennywon's Dower	177
— XVIII. Io Triumphe!	186
— XIX. Violet's Balm	195
— XX. The "Muffin Bell"	205

	Page
CHAPTER XXI. A Contradiction	215
— XXII. Remedia Amoris	225
— XXIII. A Piece of Nepotism	236
— XXIV. Mr. Quilpin Leech kills the Fatted Calf	245
— XXV. A Man with a Grievance	259
— XXVI. Mr. Leech's Luncheon	270
— XXVII. Mr. Leech makes a Proposal	276
— XXVIII. Zellie's Betrothal	288
— XXIX. Grace Marvell's Petition	294

THE BOUDOIR CABAL.

CHAPTER I.

Introduces a promising Peer.

SOME three weeks before the opening of the Parliamentary session, the "Morning Post" announced that Viscount Mayrose had returned to London from his travels, and, as good luck never comes single, Society became aware that his lordship had brought back a fine fund of handsomeness and an amusing valet who fancied himself a Count in difficulties. Such unmarried ladies as were too young to remember Lord Mayrose before his travels looked up his case in the Peerage and found what follows:—

MAYROSE, Frederick Lyon Springfield, 3rd Viscount, in the Peerage of the United Kingdom. Born 184-. Educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge. His lordship is the only son of Charles 2nd Viscount Mayrose and of his wife Emily sixth daughter of Sir Richard Leech, of Hampstead, Middlesex, formerly Commissioner at Bagpore. Sir Lyon Springfield, 1st Baron Mayrose, was raised to the Peerage by Charles I. after the battle of Edgehill; and Hugh, 7th Baron, created Viscount in 1812 for his services in the Peninsular War. Residences: Springfield Park, Hiveshire; 103 Berkeley Square; White's. Patron 1 living.

A man cannot well pass through Eton and Cambridge without leaving some traces behind him, and more than one of the unmarried ladies inquired of their brothers whether these latter had known Lord

Mayrose, and if so what manner of a man he was. The answers given were that Mayrose was a good fellow, who had been in the boats at Eton, and used to row "seven" in the 3rd Trinity crew; his weight must have been under 10st. 7lb., and he had graduated 15th Wrangler. As to his rent roll the brothers could only furnish poor accounts. Mayrose was not rich; he might have 10,000*l.* or 5,000*l.* There had been a smash, or half a smash, at some time in his family, and it was not so sure that he had anything at all. Needless to say that the sisters would have preferred hearing that Lord Mayrose's circumstances were more elastic, even though he had never rowed in a boat or wrangled—for we are a practical people, who set light store by futilities. Nevertheless, as there was a great hurrying off of old Etonians and Cantabs to drop cards at 103 Berkeley Square, it was supposed that the young peer, who had weighed less than 10st. 7lb., possessed attractive qualities, and an amiable curiosity was excited about him.

He was, in truth, the most attractive young Englishman who ever stood on a London pavement of a fine January morning, clad in a hat bought at Cairo, a coat cut in Vienna, and boots made in San Francisco, and hailed a hansom to drive to New Square, Lincoln's Inn.

Twenty-seven years old, he was rather above the middle height, of well-knit graceful figure, upright and soldierly. But his face was that of a poet. In the high-arched forehead, framed by clusters of brown,

curly hair, in the large, rather melancholy, blue eyes set under prominent brows, in the mobile upper lip shaded by a slight tawny moustache, waxed at either end after the foreign fashion, one could read keen susceptibilities, warm fancy, prompt and generous enthusiasm. The erect carriage of his head and the clear unquailing glance told of spirited courage, the vivacious mien of ready wit, the expanding nostrils of ardour in passion. But the lips, which were never quite closed, betrayed that want of hard firmness which is the besetting fault of romantic natures, and which, taken in conjunction with kindness of heart, argues a facility for being turned aside by friendly entreaties from those schemes which intellect has conceived and boldness undertaken. He had a smile of extraordinary sweetness and candour which hovered over his lips like sunlight. This smile made the very cabman cheerful, it won the heart of the shabby clerk who opened the door in New Square, and it presently warmed the soul of Mr. Deedes, the solicitor, who hastened forward with thin hands extended to greet his client.

"My dear lord, welcome again to England. It gives me the sincerest pleasure to see you back so safe and so well."

"I am glad, too, to be home, Mr. Deedes," laughed Mayrose in a musical voice of metallic resonancy. "It seems an age since I went away, yet looking at you I can think it was but yesterday."

"Oh, my lord, five years are a heavy sum out of a

shrunk purse of years like mine. To you, however, who have abundance of years in store—a very rich abundance, I trust—the time has no doubt sped by like a holiday.”

“Heigh! well not so much like a holiday as that,” answered the peer, sinking with enjoyment into a chair near the fire, and crossing his feet over the fender. “The more I travelled the better I learnt that there is no place like England, Mr. Deedes; the Turks didn’t cure me of home-love, no more did the Yankees.”

“Such is the impression which I myself have derived from foreign travel,” rejoined the solicitor, whose adventures as an explorer ranged from the Grand Hotel in Paris to the Hôtel Bellevue at Brussels; “but now you have come back we may hope that you are going to settle down and take your proper place in society.”

“If society will have me, Mr. Deedes; but that must bring us to business, for I have no right to encroach on your time with so many other people waiting.”

The lawyer bowed with a deprecating smile, touched a hand-bell, and ordered the shabby clerk to bring Lord Mayrose’s papers.

He was a venerable limb of the law was Mr. Deedes, with paternal manners, but a glance so keen that it seemed to run through an interlocutor like a long, long nail, and fix him to the business in hand. It was said that his appearance had not altered in

forty years, that he looked neither older nor younger than on the day when he had begun to practise under the Chancellorship of Lord Eldon. The swallow-tail coat he wore was part of his belief in legal traditions, like demurrers and costs; and the rest of his apparel was mouse-grey trousers, a white cravat, which went twice round his neck, and would have gone a third time if desired, a tape watch-guard, and low shoes with strings. Time seemed to have grown afraid of him in his augustness. I had marked no rude crow's-feet under his eyes, and only cast a little additional snow into his hair as though from a powder-puff and a jar.

The shabby clerk, who had an aspect as of having washed his hands in the inkstand, returned with a pair of crimson tin boxes, mottled with red spots, as if they had caught the measles from each other.

"I can never see those boxes without remembering the day when I came up from Cambridge to borrow five hundred pounds of you," remarked Mayrose gaily. "Do you remember how roundly you refused me, though the money was not for myself?"

"Generosity was ever your pet sin, my lord," benevolently rejoined the lawyer. "I trust you have ceased bestowing your confidence and money on all who would abuse your good-nature?"

"A man can only give what he has, Mr. Deedes, and it seems I have next to nothing. How much is it a year—six thousand, three, one?"

It turned out to be five thousand, but the circumlocutions by which Mayrose was made acquainted with the exact position of his affairs need not be here recorded. The late Lord Mayrose had been almost entirely ruined during the railway mania of King Hudson's time, and it had cost some trouble to save as much as 5,000*l.* a year out of the wreck. For this result, such as it was, the family were indebted to Mr. Deedes, who felt towards the Mayroses whom he had rescued that kindly regard which we generally confer upon those whom we have pulled out of the water. Mayrose, who was an orphan with no brothers or sisters, was not extravagant, and the five thousand annual pounds had not diminished in his keeping, but they had not increased. He spent his income as regularly as it was paid him, and deemed himself quit towards mankind so long as he incurred no debts. He might have added to his substance by letting his town house and country seat whilst he was abroad, but this he had scrupled to do, and Mr. Deedes, though he had expressed surprise at the resolution, had inwardly respected it, knowing that it was prompted by filial motives almost pious. On the other hand, Mr. Deedes might have enlarged his client's income by speculations, but this, as he explained, was contrary to the traditions of his firm. Messrs. Deedes, Ponder, and Goodenough made it a principle to mistrust investments bearing more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. interest, and they had found this principle work safely. Mayrose had only 5,000*l.* a year, but the revenue drawn from

corn land, sheep, felled trees, and the Consolidated Fund was as stable as the globe—nay, stabler.

However, when the proofs of his circumstances had been laid before Mayrose by means of numerous tape-girt documents, Mr. Deedes said—

“It is now my duty to tell you, Lord Mayrose, that I have received a liberal offer for your seat at Springfield. The purchaser would give 200,000*l.* for the estate and the Hall, with all its fixtures, plate, pictures, books, and furniture.”

“I hope you refused the offer without parley,” said Mayrose drily. “Nothing would induce me to part with the home of my fathers. So long as I have enough to keep the old place it shall remain mine though I have to live on dry bread.”

“I bade my client be forewarned that such would probably be your lordship’s answer.”

“May I know the would-be purchaser’s name?”

“I think it would hardly be fair to inform you,” replied Mr. Deedes, apologetically. “The knowledge that my client was hankering after your property might indispose you towards him.”

“Very likely,” laughed Mayrose. “I might regard him as a poacher. But now with my *aurea mediocritas* I must prepare to face the world. Perhaps I can add to the store, for I am anxious to work, and I daresay there are Government posts still to be had?”

“Certainly there are,” assented Mr. Deedes, surveying his client with revived interest; “and if you devoted yourself to public service, your distinguished

abilities and the experience you have doubtless gathered abroad——”

“Well, well, we will talk of my distinguished abilities another day,” interrupted the peer, reddening a little, and smiling with the cheeriness of a boy. “My only ambition for the present is to get into London clothes again, and to see whether I have forgotten the tongue of London drawing-rooms;” saying which he rose.

“You are sure to be a welcome guest everywhere this season,” responded the solicitor, rising too. “We have heard through the public papers of your many adventures. Your pilgrimage from Mecca to Medina excited universal admiration.”

“It nearly cost me my head, but if you will come and dine with me I will show you the queer disguise I wore. When shall we say? Will Sunday do? We can make an evening of it examining some curiosities I have brought back, and also discussing what I am fit for, if the topic does not bore you.”

“It will give me the greatest pleasure, and if my advice can be of any assistance to your lordship——”

“I should not think of taking any step without it,” answered Lord Mayrose heartily; and with another warm shake of the lawyer’s hand he wished him good-bye. Going out he dumbfounded the shabby clerk by dropping a sovereign into his inky fingers, then loitered a minute on the landing to light a Cuban cigar, which perfumed the staircase for an hour afterwards.

CHAPTER II.

Sir Ham Pennywon.

LORD MAYROSE had not been gone five minutes before the shabby clerk, somewhat dishevelled by the gratuity he had received, admitted into Mr. Deedes' presence another important client, who had been cooling his florid complexion in the square below, and who was none other than Sir Ham Pennywon, the well-known Prime Warden of the Sausage-Makers' Company. If London squares were managed on foreign notions of the useful, New Square would have been laid out as a flower garden open to the public, and it would have afforded Sir Ham an eligible bench, to rest his limbs on until Mr. Deedes was disengaged. But like many another square-garden, New Square, which none of the residents ever use, is prudently barred round with spikes five feet high to keep sentimental intruders aloof; so that Sir Ham, who preferred fresh air to the muskiness of a solicitor's waiting-room, had been fain to pace up and down the pavement, deriving such recreation as he might from the sight of precipitous clerks hugging bags, and stuff-gownsmen rushing nowhere in a hurry.

He was a great man in his way, was Sir Ham, nor did he pretend to be ignorant of the fact. Sprung

from nothing, he had raised the British Sausage trade to a height never contemplated by the inventor of that delicacy, and it was his boast that he had brought the choicest saveloy within the reach of the working-man. For these and other patriotic works, among which must be reckoned his indefatigable promotion of the Oyster-shell Joint-stock Utilisation Company, from which he had cleared a million pounds or so, Sir Ham had been appointed to the office of Sheriff, then to that of Alderman and Magistrate, it being a notable axiom in these isles that a man who has weighed sausages successfully is exactly the person to mete out justice. Sir Ham stood five feet two; his features were of a suffused mulberry hue, and he sported a bordering of orange whiskers, which gave his face the aspect of a sunflower with the evening light beaming on it. His eyes, which were grey, stood out of his head like marbles astonished at the height to which Sir Ham had risen over all those oyster-shells and sausages; and his hands were large across the knuckles, as if ready to grasp any new profits which might turn up to-day, to-morrow, or next week. Thus well-favoured, and replete with the consciousness of his own respectability, Sir Ham should have been happy; but he was not so, for life is a continual race after the unattainable.

“Good morning, Sir Ham,” said Mr. Deedes, advancing with a different kind of civility to that with which he had greeted Mayrose—a punctilious civility, yet very deferential.

"Good morning, Mr. Deedes." And Sir Ham sat down all of a heap in the chair which the peer had vacated, then groaned out his words slowly, as if each of them were a shilling, only to be parted with after reflection. "I have come about that parliament business. When I bought my place in Hiveshire I thought it would be easy to get into the House of Commons for Hiveborough, and so did my wife. Well, it ain't easy."

"I am sorry for that."

"No it ain't easy. Yet I ought to be in the House of Commons. I am just the man for it, so my friends say."

"They are quite right, Sir Ham."

"Aye," mumbled the Warden of the Sausage-Makers' Company, bringing down the plumpest of his forefingers on his right knee as if he were going to fix a point which everybody had overlooked. "Aye! but the electors of Hiveborough don't think so. They say that if I don't get the support of Lord Mayrose, it would be wasting my money to try. Now, as I said this morning at breakfast, I don't waste my money."

"Lord Mayrose has just left me this minute," said Mr. Deedes.

Sir Ham Pennywon lifted his round head with a jerk, and snorted with grave surprise:

"You ain't going to tell me it was that young man with the cigar and the curly-brim hat."

"I presume so, he has not been gone ten minutes."

"Well, I shouldn't have thought it, Mr. Deedes," ejaculated Sir Ham rather scandalized. "I shouldn't have believed a peer would have worn those furrin sort of clothes; but now what kind of man is he—do you mind telling me that?"

"You are sure to find him a most agreeable neighbour—but, by the by, Sir Ham, his lordship absolutely declines to sell his property even on the generous terms you propose."

"Well, it was my boy Mike who wanted to buy the place, not I," grumbled the alderman. "Mike says it ain't much use for a man to have a castle when he's scarce got enough to live in a cottage, and Mike has taken a fancy to the ark'tecture and the big rooms at the old Hall, which I haven't even seen myself. Howsoever that may be, you can't oblige a man to sell what's his own, so let's track back to that parliament business. Would Lord Mayrose support me—that's the question?"

"May I ask what are your politics?"

"What are his'n?" retorted the knight, who occasionally reverted to the solecism of his earlier sausage days when excited.

"I—I—— Upon my word!" and it suddenly occurred to Mr. Deedes that he had no knowledge of Lord Mayrose's politics. If politics ran in the blood, as they now and then do in careful households, then the Viscount ought to have been a Tory, seeing that his father and grandfather had been so before him. But these are days of innovations, foreign contagions,

and the like. Lord Mayrose, having been abroad, might have learned to run his opinions in newfangled grooves, and Mr. Deedes unfolded this before Sir Ham Pennywon, who hearkened with attention as if on the Bench dealing with a case full of intricacy.

"Then it's no use putting any pollartics of my own forward till I just know how the wind lies," replied the knight, with judicious caution. "I'm not particular myself as to which side of the House I sit on, Mr. Deedes; for to tell the results of my experience both sides of the House are exactly alike, and that's what my wife says. Only I've got a daughter to marry, and a son growing up, and for their sakes—it ain't for mine—I want to get into parliament."

"Supposing you call on Lord Mayrose?"

"Supposing you introduce me to him?" returned Sir Ham, whose wits were singularly sagacious where the main chance was concerned.

"I must ask his lordship's permission to do that, but I have no doubt he will be delighted to make your acquaintance," and in so speaking Mr. Deedes spoke his mind, for he had never met a man yet who would have been sorry to know Sir Ham.

"It's agreed on, then!" ejaculated Sir Ham, with a stolid kind of alacrity, as if clenching a bargain contracted before witnesses. "You introduce me to his lordship, and then we'll talk about the parliament business. When can I have your answer, Mr. Deedes?"

"I shall see Lord Mayrose on Sunday, and I will send you a note on Monday," rejoined the lawyer.

"That's it," nodded Sir Ham, getting up. "And now I'll leave you, for further talk just at present would be a waste of time. Business is business. Good day, Mr. Deedes."

The interview with Sir Ham had not taken long; but it left Mr. Deedes wrapped in a meditation which lasted some minutes. Sir Ham Pennywon wanted to get into parliament, and Mayrose could no doubt help him, for the popularity of his name had outlasted the wealth of his house—a phenomenon not often witnessed in these our times; but then Hiveborough was a backward place. Mr. Deedes found himself musing over Sir Ham's full-blown money bags, his oyster shares, steam sausage rollers, and what not. All these things were to him an abomination, but then Sir Ham had alluded to his possession of a daughter.

"I wonder what sort of a young person Miss Pennywon is?" reflected Mr. Deedes half aloud, as the clerk showed in the next client.

CHAPTER III.

In which Mr. Deedes does nothing.

LIFE is a fast game of cards, and it happened singularly and tragically enough that on the very day following the above events the papers reported the sudden and lamentable death of Mr. Micah Pennywon, only son of Sir Ham. This hopeful sausage-maker had left his life at the bottom of a mill-stream whilst hunting with the South Hiveshire Hounds on a roan seventeen hands high, which he bestrode like a pair of tongs. The accident threw a gloom over the Hunt, which of course adjourned its meets till after the funeral; it bowed down poor Sir Ham, who for a week could think neither of oyster-shells nor of Parliament; and it made Miss Mary Pennywon one of the richest heiresses in the kingdom.

This last aspect of the case could not fail to strike Mr. Deedes, coming hot as it did upon his meditations concerning Mayrose and Sir Ham's daughter. The position of the two families towards each other was this:—After the catastrophe which had ruined the late Viscount most of the Mayrose estates had been sold to a railway company, which had purposed constructing a new line in the neighbourhood, and building an iron-foundry for the manufacture of its own engines,

rails, and carriages exactly on the spot where the Mayrose pheasants used to roost. If this project had been realised the lands which remained in Mayrose's possession would have quintupled in value, for round the foundry would have gradually sprung up a town. But after forming the subject of a few quarto volumes of printed reports, a private Act of Parliament, an arbitration, and a lawsuit, the scheme had been abandoned as impracticable; and during Mayrose's absence the lands of the railway company, now bankrupt, were purchased by Sir Ham Pennywon. It was not only natural, it was inevitable, that a lawyer of Mr. Deedes' benevolent instincts should under such circumstances dream of restoring his noble client, by a marriage, to the ownership of part, at least, of his lost estates; and though in a general way Mr. Deedes believed only in himself and in the High Court of Chancery, the unhappy death of Mr. Micah Pennywon developed his faith in providential interference. Miss Mary might now bring her husband the whole of the former Mayrose property, and this not counting five-sixths of the oyster-shells in the British Isles.

But Mr. Deedes' hope of seeing Mayrose master of all these oyster-shells and acres was not destined to receive any encouragement at his Sunday dinner with the peer. Mayrose was the last man to consider money in appraising the wifely qualities of a woman or of anyone else, and so Mr. Deedes, much to his chagrin, discovered. The bereavement of Sir Ham was the first topic which the two gentlemen discussed

on sitting down to table in the massive and rather gloomy dining-room at Berkeley Square.

"I do not know Sir Ham," said Mayrose, with sympathy; "but I left a card on him to-day as an act of neighbourly condolence, and I will go down to Hiveshire to attend the funeral. It is a duty."

"Sir Ham will be greatly touched," answered Mr. Deedes, well pleased. "He is a worthy man, unusually rich, as your lordship knows, and that reminds me that before this sad calamity he begged I would ask your permission to introduce him. I believe he desires your support at the next election in Hiveborough."

"I thought he had a wardenship to attend to—the Beef-Boilers' Company——"

"Sausage-Makers."

"Sausage-Makers, yes; doesn't it absorb all his time?"

"He is very industrious, I know few men more so. He has never missed a sitting at the Common Council or the Justice-room, so they tell me, and he has all the concerns of the Oyster-shell Company on his hands besides."

"I should have thought this was the more reason for not saddling him with new duties," observed Mayrose, tranquilly. "But I see you don't take Madeira; perhaps you are like me, and stick to French wines right through?"

Mr. Deedes having been helped to some "Hermitage" of Count de la Sizeranne's own brand, its

generous spirit seemed to warm him, for he returned rather eloquently to Sir Ham's very reasonable wish to be a legislator.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I believe I have no influence in Hiveborough," replied Mayrose, lapsing a little serious; "but if I had"—and here he waited a moment till the servants were out of the room—"if I had, you don't take a personal interest in Sir Ham, do you?"

"He is my client, nothing more," protested Mr. Deedes.

"Then I may speak frankly? Well, I confess Sir Ham doesn't quite come up to my estimate of what a Member of Parliament should be. All the merit in him seems to be drawn from those oysters."

"A self-made man, who has built up his own fortunes," remarked Mr. Deedes, trying to smile too.

"No doubt, and that's a great thing; but isn't Parliament rather overstocked with this sort of men nowadays?"

Mr. Deedes, disposing of turbot, explained that in a country which aspired to walk at the head of civilisation the self-made man, just in his works and well-feathered, was fated to take a chief place; else would Progress be a vain word, and the fruit of one's labours a delusion. He expatiated fluently on this axiom, and as he did so it appeared to him that his host looked very polite and handsome, listening, in his new English clothes, and with the bloom which the welcome of a hundred friends had added to his features. Only

the young peer's enthusiasm on behalf of Sir Ham Pennywon was like damp firewood, and required kindling.

"I think we are agreed about the self-made man's deserts," answered he, presently. "We only differ as to the particular recompense which suits him. If a self-made philosopher, author, inventor, lawyer—anyone to be proud of, in short—came and stood for Hiveborough, he should have my support and welcome. Laws should be made with brains, and a man whose brains are better than his fellows' has a natural right to legislate for them—so at least it seems to me."

"There can be no doubt of it," assented Mr. Deedes.

"I am not talking didactically, am I? But what I mean is that the mere moneyed man's rewards need not be the same as the thinker's. Now Sir Ham has reaped all sorts of rewards. He is a millionaire, knighted, head of his corporation, alderman of his City ward—a very king on his own ground!"

"I suppose he would love to secure the crowning honour dear to most of us Englishmen," submitted Mr. Deedes, with mild tenacity.

"And his ambition would be a just one if Parliament were only an honour; but surely there are duties? a great country to govern; and, judging by recent English politics, I fancy men like Sir Ham Pennywon have had too much to do already with our rule and governance. It hurts me, I must say, to hear

foreigners talk about England as they are doing—little Frenchmen, you know, whom we have thrashed all through the pages of history; and then those Yankees!”

“O! I can guarantee that Sir Ham is not wanting in patriotism, my lord; and I make bold to say he has no prejudiced leanings towards either party—Whig or Tory,” observed Mr. Deedes, reassuringly.

For all this he was obliged to drop the unprejudiced knight. Mayrose was not to be convinced, and when by and by the lawyer let fall a hint about Miss Pennywon having become such a fine heiress, the peer only laughed:—

“I wish the future husband joy of her money, and a taste for sausage-meat.”

“Miss Pennywon will have no lack of suitors, I apprehend.”

“Of that we may be sure, she will have only to pick and choose out of the city.”

“Or of the peerage? There was a very great marriage last season between Lord Lackland and Miss Lombard.”

“So much the worse for my lord,” said Mayrose, “when a nobleman marries for money, Mr. Deedes, he is like a man setting a trap and baiting it with his own finger.”

There the delicate subject perforce fell. After dinner, as they trifled over claret and coffee, Mayrose spoke of his adventures abroad, which had been stirring enough, and of the numerous changes, social

and political, which had occurred at home during his absence. Mr. Paradyse, who, when Mayrose left England, had just come into office with a triumphant majority, was still Premier, but *quantum mutatus*—his majority had dwindled and grown fractious, and Mr. Paramount, the enigmatical leader of the Opposition, was expected to worry him sore in the forthcoming session. Mayrose avowed that he rejoiced at this prospect, for he was no admirer of Mr. Paradyse: and he even slightly shocked Mr. Deedes—Conservative though the latter was—by bluntly alluding to some of the Premier's most popular utterances as revolutionary clap-trap. For his own part he longed for a government that should rule with less speechifying, make England impregnable, London habitable, keep Radicals, Irish and other, in their proper place, that is under the thumb, and teach foreign states to be civil. Mayrose added that he was decidedly favourable to compulsory military service, and as Mr. Deedes' conservatism was of the sort that would conserve England's greatness by keeping her weaker than all the neighbouring states, the lawyer could not help musing that some of his client's views smacked dangerously of paradox.

The conversation was turned by Bino, the peer's valet, bearing in, by the help of a footman, a large box full of costly things which Mayrose had collected on his travels. There were odds and ends from Persia, India, Japan, and, amongst others, a curious Chinese writing desk of sculptured ivory inlaid with

mother of pearl, which he pressed on Mr. Deedes' acceptance. Then he drew from a coffer of perfumed sandal wood a unique cashmere shawl, large enough to carpet a room and worth about a thousand guineas to a London buyer.

"This is a present from a Rajah to whom I gave a musical box that played 'Pop goes the weasel.' I intend it for Lady Rosemary."

"I was going to say how perfect it would look on the shoulders of a future Lady Mayrose. But it will be worn grandly by the countess," said Mr. Deedes, feeling the rich texture. "Her ladyship must have been delighted to hear of your return."

"Lady Rosemary was like a second mother to me," observed Mayrose, with feeling. "I have not yet announced my arrival to her, but purpose writing to Elmwood to-night. Have you seen the Earl of late?"

"He was at my chambers not a week ago; in as excellent health as ever, and expecting high office, should Mr. Paramount return to power."

"And the young Ladies Carol?"

"The reigning beauties of last season; they were presented at Court together, and society was at a loss to decide which was the fairest."

"That's news indeed," smiled Mayrose, "I am not sure that I have not brought them home each a doll. But I find out every hour what differences five years make."

"They do, indeed, my lord," sighed the solicitor,

“life is but a rapid succession of transformation scenes!”

It being now late, and Mr. Deedes having some miles to ride to his suburban mansion, took his leave. He had not attempted to renew the discussion on Sir Ham's merits, nor on the prospects of Miss Pennywon, because he saw that those topics were not palatable to his host. But he departed hoping that the funeral would promote an acquaintanceship, and an understanding between his two clients.

Mayrose, after seeing the solicitor into his brougham, went into his study, and, before going to bed, wrote the following letter. It was addressed to the Countess of Rosemary, Elmwood Park, North Hiveshire:—

103 *Berkeley Square.*

My dear Lady Rosemary,—If you have not forgotten, more than I have, the many kindnesses you showed me when I was a boy at school and college, you will not be surprised to see me at Elmwood before the end of this week. I have just returned from abroad, having picked up a great deal of what is called experience, and learned to fancy myself much wiser than I am. At all events, I find I am out of tune with English thought, and it will be a gracious thing of you to give me the true keynote. I am going down to Hiveshire to attend poor Mr. Pennywon's funeral, and shall then remain a day inspecting Springfield, which I have not seen for five years. On Thursday (D. V.) I will travel to Elmwood, and if this sudden visit be no intrusion, ask you to harbour me for a week. I may already confide to you that I am possessed with a curious idea that my country wants me to serve her in a post of labour and trust. I must have caught the hallucination in America, where every man who is not fit for stone-breaking turns politician, and exerts his incapacity at the public expense.

My love to Azalea and Violet—though I should with more propriety say, my respects to *Lady* Azalea and *Lady* Violet Carol, for I hear that my little playfellows have bloomed into full-grown flowers; also my kindest regards to the Earl, and believe me,

Dear Lady Rosemary,
Most faithfully yours,
MAYROSE.

CHAPTER IV.

A Funeral and a Vignette.

THE funeral of Mr. Micah Pennywon was an imposing ceremony. A hundred gentlemen of the South Hiveshire Hunt mustered in the dining-room at Penny Hall and sipped sherry and mulled claret while the undertaker robed them in long cloaks, and distributed to each man black gloves a size too large for him. The five-score horses of the mourners champed on the gravel-sweep outside, while the grooms were blowing on their fingers to keep off the January cold, and the hearse with six horses and twelve crests of plumes towered gloomily amid the fog. Two mutes stood at the door, both blue from the weather; and the drivers of the ten mourning coaches, looking top-heavy with their hat-bands, tried to beat the numbness from their extremities by drumming their fingers on the hammer-cloths, and tapping their feet against the foot-boards. Inside the hall darkly-draped, footmen with black epaulets and aiglets flitted about, bearing trays of decanters; and down the staircase stole housemaids with black ribbons in their caps, carrying nosegays of violets and mortuary wreaths into the library filled with heavily-bound books and

massive mahogany furniture. Here three undertaker's men in shirt-sleeves were soldering down a leaden coffin to be enclosed in an oaken one, the which in its turn was to be encased in one of maple covered with red velvet. On this last a silver-gilt plate, engraved with a Latin inscription by the Vicar of Penny, recorded the "Æternal Memory of Micah Pennywon, the pious son of Ham Pennywon, Knight."

Into this scene of sumptuous desolation, Mayrose, who had ridden over from his seat at Springfield, entered a few minutes before the hour for starting, adorned with black gloves of his own. He was quickly recognised by Sir Ham, who, contrary to the usual etiquette, stood in the drawing-room among the mourners. The unhappy knight, who shuffled forward and thanked him profusely:—

"All this kindness breaks my heart, my lord, and it would have broken poor Micah's if he could have seen it—a good son, my lord, never caused me an hour's trouble."

"I was much grieved," answered Mayrose, who muttered the remainder of the sentence usual on these occasions.

"Thank'ee, my lord, thank'ee. I used to tell the boy:—'Never go out riding, Mike, till you can rely on your seat;' but at business or in his saddle, my lord, he was always sure of himself, and this is the end of it."

Poor Sir Ham, whose eyes were blurred with

tears, was divided between the true grief caused by the death of his son and the great honour done him by the county magnates who were going to follow the latter's coffin on their covert hacks. All the morning he had been wiping his eyes in the presence of peers and big commoners—Lord Beaujolais, the Master of the Hounds; Lord Adolphus Drone and Sir Charles Cautious, the South Hiveshire members; various other noble Drones of the ducal house of Bumblebeigh, and dozens of minor county people in sable array—so that it would have needed little illusion to convince Sir Ham that his son, so universally lamented, must have perished gloriously on a battlefield. Death in its sudden, violent forms was, in truth, a strange and new thing to these Pennywons. So far as they were aware, all their fathers had died from over-eating or over-drinking themselves—died in their own beds, fat and surfeited—or asthmatic folk. Never had one of them shed his blood for his country, sacrificed his life to science, to adventure, or to saving other men's lives; and this death of Micah Pennywon in the hunting-field, therefore, came upon them like a ghastly innovation—something like a brutal practical joke of Nature's. For all which, while mourning for his son, Sir Ham could not lose sight of the soothing fact that he himself was still alive, and so snivelled dolefully to Mayrose between two sobs—

“That lawyer, Deedes, must have told your lordship that I was for going into Parliament if you'd help me. It was all for Mike's sake, poor lad! and

I'd have ended by making a lord of him; but I'll come forrard all the same. Yes, I think it'll do me good, and my friends say I'm made for Parliament, my lord. Then I've my daughter's 'appiness to look after."

Mayrose was not prepared to be asked for his support under these funereal circumstances; but he was spared the necessity of committing himself, as his good heart might have led him to do, by the master of the ceremonies, who glided across the room, gold watch in hand, and whispered to Sir Ham. This was the signal for starting, and all the gentlemen, flocking out slowly into the cold, mounted their horses, while the coffin was borne across the hall by twelve groaning men, of whom nothing was visible but the legs, by reason of the flowing pall. Lord Beaujolais, bare-headed, placed himself at the head of the cavalcade, behind the tenth mourning-coach, the other horsemen formed behind him in a long troop, four abreast; and when the hearse door had been shut with a snap—when the mourning-coaches had been filled with collateral Pennywons, chaplains, doctors, members of the Sausage-Makers' Company, and other important mourners from the City—then the procession broke into movement, wound across Penny Park, through a lane of sheepish bumpkins, and so to Penny Church, where the bellringers were tolling one stroke a minute. Penny was a new parish, formed by Sir Ham out of his estates. The church was a new one, spick-span white, and surrounded with a village

of new model cottages, roofed with pink tiles. The churchyard was new, too, no one had yet been buried in it—and the vicar who read the service was newest of all.

After the dismal ceremony, Mayrose turned his horse's head homewards, and was accompanied part of the way by a rush of riders, who congratulated him boisterously on his return to England, and hoped to see him regularly in future at covert side, Quarter Sessions, and everywhere else. So they said, and their warm greetings pleased him; but he was not sorry when they left him to pursue his ride alone over the broad lands which had once been his ancestors', and were now Sir Ham's. Somehow he was in low spirits after this morning's events. He had done his duty as a gentleman and as a neighbour by attending the funeral of a man whom he had never seen, and for whom he cared nothing; but he had not reckoned on the impressions that would be aroused in him by the contrast of Sir Ham's rich domains and his own diminished property. These impressions were disagreeably poignant. To wealth in itself Mayrose was indifferent, and he had even thought, when abroad, that he could spin himself a very snug bachelor life out of his 5,000*l.* a year. But the homage paid in England to great landowners, and the ambiguous position in which a man is placed who has a splendid name to keep up, without possessing adequate means for so doing, struck him with force now that for the first time he reasoned practically on the subject. If

the Railway Company had kept his lands, the bitterness would have been less. Trains would have flashed, rumbled, and come into collision with each other over the quondam Mayrose glebes, and there would have been nothing in this to excite his jealousy. But that new Penny Church and parish—that new Penny Hall, which had been built of Portland stone and granite, as if its new-come owners meant to take immutable root there, and to jostle his name out of men's memories—all this was painful. It put him out of conceit with Springfield, its long corridors of empty, old furnished chambers, and its modest girdle of land scarce a mile round; and it made him feel like a stranger in the county where past Mayroses had all been masters. However, the young Viscount was too gallant hearted not to wince at thoughts which had any savour of meanness or envy in them, so shaking his head, he set his horse at a hedge or two to see if he had left any of his nerve in foreign lands, and at a rapid canter reached Hiveborough. This decaying market town had once been enclosed bodily in the Mayrose estates, but it now marked the bounds between the Springfield and Penny properties.

“I wonder how that man could think I had retained any influence in this place,” mused Mayrose, as he ambled down the main street and remarked that every tradesman having a soul to save had disfigured his shop front by putting up shutters in honour of Mr. Micah Pennywon. But this reflection was unjust, for the Hiveborough people loved him

well. The town had not been sold to Sir Ham; it was still in the hands of the official assignees of the bankrupt railway, and, electorally speaking, the inhabitants might consider themselves independent. They had been so long accustomed, however, to think and act at the beck of the Springfield family that they were not inclined to throw off this easy habit, which had grown into a sweet second nature. Hiveborough owed everything to the Springfields—its existence to begin with, for a Lord Mayrose had built the place; then its church and town-hall, its Gothic market-cross, where Dissenters and Papists took turns at having their ears cropped in happy days gone by; and last, its famous museum of stuffed birds—fit symbol of the flight of progress as understood by a well-feathered and cautious people. Hiveborough was not high-minded, and had no proud looks. It preferred adopting the opinions which bigger cities had discarded sooner than cut out new and stiff ones for itself. It clung mildly to Church and State, and had not yet embraced that strong-minded doctrine that all things built up by the wisdom of past centuries are good only to be knocked down by the Philistinism of the present.

So Mayrose rather to his surprise found himself fingering his hat-brim at every step through this placid borough. The tradesmen left their counters to bow to him from doorsteps; others came bravely on to the pavement and smiled to him as if he were a son of theirs, and some of the tenderer sex sketched

respectful curtseys behind window-panes, blushing to see the Viscount's blue eyes light on them with pleasant recognition. At last, opposite a photographer's shop inscribed in carmine letters "TOUZLE," the peer's progress was definitively stopped by a youth in a velvet jacket elaborately stained with acids, who rushed out stammering—

"My respects to your lordship—Jack Touzle, my lord, son of your lordship's old gardener."

"So it is! Why, Jack, you've overgrown me!" exclaimed Mayrose, reining in and holding out his hand cheerfully. "You'd make two of me, I declare. Have you anyone to hold my horse?"

"Yes—here, Dick! Step in, my lord, in memory of old birds'-nesting days. Let me show you Mrs. Touzle, and I'd be glad to take your photograph."

"You shall indeed; not to-day, I suppose, for we have one of our Hiveshire fogs on. But how came you to give up gardening?"

"Oh it is a long story, my lord. After your lordship went away, Springfield was no longer what it used to be, and then I rather think I fell in love with Mrs. Touzle, who's here—My lord, my wife, my dear, Lord Mayrose."

Pretty buxom Mrs. Touzle, who was sorting albums, made her obeisance, reddening, and received a compliment which could be given without flattery; then her husband rushed out and committed the peer's horse to his shop boy, with injunctions not to play

games with it. A rather needless injunction seeing that the horse was sixteen hands high and the gameful boy scarce four feet. How Mr. Touzle had been moved to forsake the cultivation of flowers for that of negatives need not concern us here; but the details had an interest for Mayrose, and this interest was fitly capped when Mr. Touzle produced likenesses of the different eminent persons whom he had photographed, in order to prove that the world wagged well with him.

"Mr. Micah Pennywon, my lord, the poor gentleman who is just dead. He did a great deal of good about here, and would have done more if he had lived."

"A kindly face," remarked Mayrose. "Is Sir Ham Pennywon popular in the borough?"

"He tries to be, my lord," said Mrs. Touzle.

"Well, and he succeeds," added her husband. "There's not an ounce of tea drank at Penny Hall but is bought in the town, and Sir Ham goes the length of having himself and all his servants dressed by the tailor here, which promotes business, and though I don't say but that Lady Pennywon is mighty particular in seeing that the tradesmen bring proper weight, I believe if Sir Ham comes forward at the next election he will easily get the better of the sitting member, Mr. Abel Dexter, who has never spent a halfpenny in the borough. Here is Mr. Dexter's portrait, my lord."

"Mr. Dexter is a barrister, is he not?" asked Mayrose, who had heard of this gentleman through Mr. Deedes. "Handsome, energetic features, he looks as if he could make a good speech."

"Ah, my lord, he could talk a magpie out of a silver spoon! No one ever heard his like for palaver-ing. Quite a young man he is too, and got elected by a mere fluke. The other candidate died suddenly, then Mr. Dexter came forward when there was no time to choose another man, and he made such fools of all the women that there wasn't even a contest. After he had speechified three days in the borough no one would have had a chance against him!"

Mayrose had taken up the photograph of the talkative M.P., but before he could study the physiognomy his eyes were attracted by a vignette, which Mrs. Touzle pushed forward and which had certainly fascinated many another customer before him.

It was that of a girl in the full bloom and radiance of English beauty. Nothing could be brighter or chaster than the expression of the face; nothing sweeter or more intelligent than the eyes, which seemed to sparkle with candour and gaiety. It was a face to dream over, and luckless the man who should dream over it too long without any hope of going beyond dreams! Mayrose felt that the features were familiar to him, and he endeavoured to recollect where he had met them before, but could only call up vague images!

"Who is this?" he inquired.

"Why, my lord, don't you know?" exclaimed the photographer. "It's Lord Rosemary's daughter, Lady Azalea Carol; and here is her sister, Lady Violet."

"No doubt they have changed since his lordship last saw them," observed Mrs. Touzle, archly.

"Changed indeed!" murmured Mayrose, "I will buy this vignette, Mrs. Touzle."

CHAPTER V.

Lady Rosemary.

IN stating to Mr. Deedes verbally, and to Lady Rosemary by letter, that he wished to take a part in the government of his country, Mayrose was more in earnest than his mere tone might have suggested. He had gone abroad very deliberately to pick up the sum of worldly knowledge which can only be acquired by foreign travel; and, now that he was home, he had no idea of letting his attainments lie by like unproductive capital. He spoke French, German, and Italian fluently; knew all about the politics and customs' duties, the manufactures and judicial institutions, of the countries he had visited; and had furthermore brought back from the New World a quiet contempt for democracy such as lent a pleasant zest to his opinions. It is a great point to feel a resolute contempt for something; though it may not pay so well as pococuranteism. Mayrose was convinced in his simple way that British Constitutionalism, as it had worked from the first Reform Bill to the death of Palmerston, was the soundest thing ever discovered; and to see a parcel of talkative men pull down this fabric simply because it suited the immediate purpose

of their party interests, seemed to him as wanton a piece of work as the conduct of savages, who cut down a tree by the roots to pick off the fruit. Mayrose longed to interpose whatever strength and energy he might possess in the way of this selfish destruction; and added to this feeling of patriotism was of course the natural ambition of a man, young and eager, to find occupation and to earn distinction for himself.

The Countess of Rosemary was just the person to help him to satisfy this longing. The wife of an amiable man of large property, who had sat in several Cabinets, and might at any moment become a Minister again, she wielded a social influence much in excess of her husband's personal weight. Not to know Lady Rosemary was grief to the pushing Londoner; to be counted among her intimates was a certain passport to whatever favour, social or political, the aspirant might desire. Lady Rosemary knew how to collect remarkable men round her, and, what is more, to retain their allegiance. She was popular with all sorts of persons who, generally speaking, love only themselves; and it was not the least proof of her talent that, disdaining insincerity, she had told truths—now and then very plain truths—to sensitive people without ever offending them. The secret of this lay in her thorough kindness of heart, in her supreme tact and utter want of malice. Over-ardent politicians who had made a false start, authors whom vanity or a passing fit of spleen was driving to write on a

wrong tack, excitable men who had suffered from a grievance and were in a mood to run their heads against those stone-walls with which grievances have been fenced about ever since the world began, and coquettes who were hovering round pitfalls—all these people had been adroitly saved by her, and led back into straight paths. Their self-esteem might chafe at first—as self-esteem ever does when rescued from the follies it contemplates—but reflection ended by healing the soreness, and the people saved paid to Lady Rosemary the debt of gratitude that was her due. If Lord Rosemary had been of the stuff from which Prime Ministers are moulded, his wife would have made him Prime Minister, but he was in all respects a pococuranteist, and could bring to bear upon politics no other aptitudes than the universally shallow education of a man of the world and an imperturbable serenity. It was known that such posts as he had held in different administrations, and held creditably for that matter, had been bestowed on him for his wife's merits, not for his own; and an anecdote related that on a certain occasion when a new Premier had resolved to entrust to the Earl of Rosemary no less an office than the Lord Keepership of the Waste Papers, he wrote down absently on his list that was to be sent to the papers:—

“Lord Keeper—Lady Rosemary.”

Such was the lady to whom Mayrose had written. She was a distant connection of his, and, as he thankfully acknowledged, had shown him much kindness

during his boyhood. His being an orphan had given him a claim on her; but the chief claim was that Lady Rosemary, to her sorrow, had no son of her own. She had pitied and petted little Mayrose at first because he was motherless; then, growing to love his sunny nature, had cherished him maternally for his own sake. He had frequently spent his holidays at Elmwood, being called "Freddy" by the family, and treating Lady Rosemary's two daughters—Azalea, or Zellie, and Violet—as if they were his sisters. By-and-by the hard reading of college life had rendered his visits to Elmwood somewhat rarer; after which he had started on his travels, and whilst abroad had corresponded but seldom with his benefactress, feeling some modesty about intruding the dry record of his wanderings upon a "grande dame" so much absorbed with graver concerns. Since his return, however, he had been blaming himself for this remissness, fearing it might be misconstrued; and it was with some relief that he found, on return home after his visit to Mr. Touzle, an affectionate letter from Lady Rosemary chiding him gently for his long silence, and inviting him to come and stay at Elmwood till the opening of the Session. She promised he would meet Mr. Paramount, the Leader of the Party to which Lord Rosemary belonged, for this personage was expected on a three days' visit, and she begged he would start as soon as possible.

He did start on the following afternoon. There was nothing to detain him at Springfield, for his

steward, acting under the orders of Mr. Deedes, had kept the property in such fine order that walking about it offered no more excitement than surveying the squares of a chess-board. Besides, Springfield Hall was a doleful residence for a bachelor. One of his ancestors had entertained the Mutton-eating Monarch there along with his whole suite, and Mayrose felt that he and his three domestics cut the same figure in the big place as four peas in a cauldron. A waggonette and pair was hired from the Springfield Arms at Hiveborough to carry the peer over the fifteen miles of turnpike road which separated Springfield from Elmwood; and Mayrose took the reins joyfully in hand, whilst his luggage located itself behind under the custody of his polyglot valet Bino.

One word about this Bino, who styled himself on paper Albino de Santo Paolo, and was a character. By some inductive reasoning of his own Bino had come to fancy himself a Count; and having once upon a time been indirectly concerned in a State conspiracy (he had acted as courier to a Carbonaro Marquis travelling between Venice and Rome), he was persuaded that the entire police of Europe were on the look-out for him. But he took his precautions by subjecting his head and face hair to a variety of misleading processes, such as wearing now a moustache and hair clipped into bristles, now a full beard and curls cascading over his shoulders. At odd times he would dye his poll altogether either flaxen or a bright red, and to this constant prudence he attributed

his immunity from arrest and ignominious death. He could neither read nor write, but had not his equal for making coffee or preparing a breakfast in three courses out of nothing. He spoke no language, but could bandy the slang of every city from Alexandria to St. Giles's, and his imperious jargon had been known to cow hotel managers, railway guards, and steamboat stewards. Mayrose had picked him up at Malta, and master and man had fared together ever since on terms of mutual confidence. Bino consulted the peer in his love difficulties, which were numerous, and about the management of an imaginary estate which he professed to own near Smyrna; Mayrose was better brushed, catered for, and cared for by Bino than he could have been by any dozen other servants, and would not have parted with him for a great deal. Now, stepping into the waggonette, Bino wore the jaunty air of a man who stands at length on a free soil, and finds he need not cut his hair except when it suits him.

"We are going to Elmwood, Bino," said Mayrose, touching his horses into a sharp trot as they cleared the park gates; "and mind you behave yourself with the servant girls. We are in England, remember."

"Yes, milord, I not likely to forget I am in England. The Pope he not catch me here. I wish he take the idea of running after me himself; this great country soon poison him with its *cuisine*."

"Why, do you find the cooking so bad as that?"

"Ah, milord; figure to yourself my sensations

when I see your cook in Barkelay Squarre empty a pot of red pepper into a pheasant *salmi*! If she had been a man I would have exclaimed in my fury; but alas! she was a woman, and I could only smile and sigh!"

"We are coming to some frozen ruts," laughed Mayrose, "shut your mouth a minute, or you'll bite your tongue."

"Yes milord, and you take care of that side 'oss, English 'osses the queerest in the world; they run as if their tails was on fire, *Maladetto*!"

The expletive was evoked by one of the predicted ruts, which caused the waggonette to jump and made Bino's teeth close with a snap on his glib tongue. The anguish kept him silent a few minutes, forcing him to hold the injured member between his forefinger and thumb; and before he was in a position to give speech again, Mayrose had met with an adventure. He drove rather like a Frenchman, taking all he could get out of the horses, so that their knees seemed to click against the bits, and he was turning down a lane at a spanking trot, when a loud squealing of children's voices was raised. A score of little girls, in charge of their schoolmistress, were out for an airing, and a little mite, about six years old, had strayed into the middle of the road, and in trying to get out of the horses' way had tripped up and fallen. Mayrose had only just time to pull up his team sharp, as their hoofs were on the point of trampling over her. The child, seeing herself safe, scrambled to her

legs, and, though crying, put a finger in her mouth and laughed.

Mayrose, moved by the narrow escape, turned to offer an apology to the schoolmistress, but his eyes had scarcely rested on her, when he threw the reins to Bino, and alighted hat in hand.

"Dear me, this is unexpected! I have surely the pleasure of speaking to Miss Marvell?"

The schoolmistress, who was not more than two-and-twenty, blushed, but acknowledged the bow with a dignity denoting superior station,

"Yes, Lord Mayrose, but it is a long time since we met at Naples."

"Too long; but what good fortune brings you into our neighbourhood?"

"It is not good fortune, but ruin," answered the schoolmistress; "my father has been reduced to poverty, and I am teacher at Sir Ham Pennywon's village school."

The contained bitterness with which this was said was rendered more impressive by the rare beauty of the speaker. Mayrose had made a passing acquaintance with the Marvells in Italy, during the early period of his travels. Mr. Marvell then held some appointment under the Colonial Office, and had gone to recruit his health at Naples, where his daughter, Grace, was the belle of the British colony, and the admiration of Neapolitans without number. She was tall and faultlessly moulded—a beauty with dark waving hair, lustrous eyes, and a small exquisite

mouth. Her face revealed intellect of a high order, but also coldness, and the pride resulting from undeserved misfortunes bravely borne. She was one of those women to whom wealth, rank, and men's worship seem to belong by Nature's patent; and here among these country school-children she looked like a young queen defrauded of her rights.

"I am most sorry to hear what you tell me, Miss Marvell," remarked Mayrose, with concern; "is Mr. Marvell's health impaired?"

"My father was unjustly deprived of his appointment and disgraced—that is how our ruin came," answered the schoolmistress quietly; "in consequence of his misfortunes his health gave way, and I fear his mind has been troubled too."

"Well, but surely if injustice has been done it can be remedied. Could I be of any assistance to you? if so, pray command me."

Miss Marvell smiled a little sceptically.

"If you were a Cabinet Minister, Lord Mayrose, I might perhaps appeal to you; but even then I don't know, for to interest oneself in a fallen man requires a sort of courage which I find is not common. No, I prefer asking you something easier to grant; I should be happy if you would allow me to stroll sometimes with my young charges in your beautiful park."

Mayrose naturally gave this permission, and seeing that Miss Marvell wished to close the interview, he did no more than renew his offers of service, then

made a respectful bow and reascended his waggonette. At that moment a vague reminiscence recurred to him of a passing flirtation with Grace Marvell—an excursion to Pompeii and a glove he had begged of her. He felt tempted to look round to revive his recollection by another glance at her features, and had he done so he would have seen her stand and gaze after his retreating vehicle with some wistfulness. Perhaps she remembered the glove better than he did. . . .

This rencounter and Grace's communication about her father were strange enough to keep Mayrose pensive for the next mile, but soon the impression wore off with the rapidity of the speed and the thought of the old friends he was going to meet. Hedgerows and cottages, steeples and mile-posts flitted by; field after field dropped behind, and every minute opened up a new panorama of fair English scenery bathed in the saffron light of a winter sun. An hour and a half after starting the waggonette passed the lodge gates at Elmwood, grated on the gravel of mile-long avenue fringed with the stately trees whence the estate derived its name, and swept up to the door of the hall.

Mayrose had timed himself to arrive at the orthodox hour for country visits—that is, just sixty minutes before dinner. But the pace had been so good that he found himself with an hour to spend before the first dinner-bell. The butler, an old acquaintance, smiled on him and wished him welcome, a brace of

footmen assisted Bino and the luggage to alight, and Mayrose learned that Lady Rosemary was walking in the grounds.

"I think her ladyship has gone to the dairy," said the butler; "shall I show your lordship the way?"

But Mayrose knew the way by himself, and preferred to go alone. He strode through the hall with its antlered head of deer, its trophies of arms and full-length portraits, and entered one of the morning rooms where he used to prepare his fishing-tackle in days gone by, with Zellie and Violet tying the flies for him.

Everything was not as he had left it, for Elmwood was not a place where furniture was made to outlast generation after generation. Even the pictures on the walls, the china on the mantelshelves, the statuettes in the corners were changed, as beseemed a house which extended to Art a perpetual and ever-generous patronage. Mayrose passed through the open window on to a marble terrace, where half-a-dozen red and blue macaws began marking time on their perches at his approach, and cocked their heads to inspect him. He repaid their scrutiny with interest, and was casting a glance around him to reconnoitre the garden, the lawns, and the park beyond, when a sound of horses' hoofs fell on his ear, and, cantering down a bridle-path that skirted the garden, he saw Azalea Carol, escorted by a sallow young rider who sat upright as a bar of iron. He would not have recognised her had it not been for that photograph

at Mr. Touzle's; but now he walked quickly to the end of the terrace, and ran down the steps to meet her.

She was even prettier than her photograph. The ride had sent a mantling colour to her face, and in the well-fitting habit that set off her shapely form, in her coquettish riding-hat, and with the scarlet pink stuck in her bosom, she looked the perfection of adorable girlhood. She, too, recognised her old playmate—though her memory had been refreshed by no photograph—and begging her companion to assist her in dismounting, she ran forward towards Mayrose with both hands extended, and put up her smiling face to be kissed.

"Oh, Freddy, how glad mamma will be to see you! But how cruel of you not to write to us for these long years!"

"I ought to have written, Zellie," confessed he, kissing her tenderly in very brotherly wise.

"So long without a line!" added she, looking up at him with simple reproach; then turning round towards her companion, "You know Lord Hornette, I believe?"

"Yes, Mayrose and I are old Eton friends," answered this future Duke of Bumblebeigh, who had looked a little blue during the kissing. "How are you, old fellow?—delighted to see you again!"

"And he has become so handsome!" exclaimed Zellie, linking her arm in Mayrose's, and scanning him again like a sister. "Come and look for mamma.

She will be more pleased than you can think, and so will Violet—but here is mamma!”

Lady Rosemary and her younger daughter were coming over the garden lawn, and Mayrose, with heart still beating, advanced bare-headed to receive a welcome not less warm than Zellie's. Once again he kissed and was kissed, and Lady Rosemary, taking his hands fondly in hers, said—

“We have been speaking of you as a truant these five years, Freddy, but we cannot see you without forgiving you.”

“I begin to feel now what it is to come home, dear Lady Rosemary,” answered Mayrose with some emotion.

CHAPTER VI.

In which Lord Mayrose finds his Keynote.

THE dinner at Elmwood on this night of Mayrose's arrival was very convivial. Lord Rosemary, who was always glad, was particularly so at shaking hands again with his young relative, and it detracted nothing from the pleasantness of the occasion that his lordship seemed to forget whether Mayrose had been absent five years or one. His mind was a smooth tablet, from which he sponged off people who were out of his sight, though he willingly wrote them down again when they came back. Handsome, well-dressed, with an unruffled look as if he were quite content to see the world wag as it did, he was the model of a host, and when his country wanted him the perfection of a trustful statesman. If half England had disappeared under water in a night, he would have made the best of the half that remained, for he knew that we live in changeful times, and must not worry ourselves about unexpected events.

Mayrose gave his arm to the Countess, and the other guests were the Earl and Countess of Beaujolais, the Countess of Coralmere, Sir Charles Cautious, M.P., one of the county members, the young Marquis of

Chevychase, the Earl of Hornette, and his brother, Adolphus—or Dolly—Drone, and the Reverend Nonus Nines, who had known Mayrose at Cambridge.

All these were remarkable persons, eminently fitted to give the travelled peer that keynote to English thought which he professed to have lost.

Lord Beaujolais, a steadfast Tory, lorded it over the South Hiveshire pack, and shone not merely as a peerless M.F.H., but as a fertile inventor of improved horsegear—bits, stirrups, &c. He had a mighty determined face, adorned with a flowing hay-coloured beard, and piercing blue eyes, and he was remarkable in the world's esteem for his promptness in taking decisive resolutions, which his wife passed her time in adroitly bringing to nought. He wore over his waistcoat the azure riband of St. Patrick, and his wife coveted for him the darker one of the Garter sported by Lord Rosemary. My Lady was a pretty little woman with a baby countenance, but knowledge enough of this world's ways to have sufficed two old men. Born of noble but poor family she owned a multitude of famished relations, and it was her constant aim to conciliate their claims on her with her paramount duty of keeping her husband's fortune intact for her children. This she did by giving the relatives no money, but straining every rag of interest which Lord B. possessed to procure them posts of emolument. It was no slight matter to Lady Beaujolais whether her party were in or out of office, for she regarded Mr. Paradyse as a man who was barring

her and her family out of a well-stocked larder, and her moral objections to his policy were consequently feeling and warm. Lord Beaujolais was a great trial to Lady B. with his decisive resolutions, which were always wrong-headed; but my lady was never seen to such advantage as when she coaxed him from his bent by persuading him that the plans which she substituted for his were in reality of his own imagining, and entitled him to the utmost credit. The M.F.H. had so often entitled himself to credit in this way that he had come to think the world largely in his debt.

Lady Coralmere, sister to Lady Beaujolais, was the young and fascinating wife of an aged statesman—not present at Elmwood—who had been expected to die every month for some years past, but tarried in fulfilling the general expectation. He had been important and acute once, but had grown deaf since he had ceased to hear the world talk about him; and now his pretty, childless wife went into society alone, being much courted for the large fortune which Lord C. had settled on her by a bevy of gentlemen, who read the obituary every morning with mingled feelings at never finding the noble lord in it. Constance Coralmere's most ardent suitor, in view of funereal contingencies, was Lord Adolphus Drone, M.P. for South Hiveshire, and it was generally taken for granted that whenever her comely ladyship became widowed she would enrich with her dowry the great House of Drone, which prudent alliance and hereditary par-

simony had rendered one of the wealthiest in the peerage.

But one must bate irreverent breath in alluding to this great House of Drone, which has had a voice in the councils of this realm ever since it was governable. No Drone ever did anything out of the common way, for there was no reason why he should; but the number of honest, square-headed, and grandly self-satisfied Drones who have mis-commanded our land and sea forces, bungled negotiations for us abroad, voted Acts for us at home, confirmed us, judged us, and taxed us is a long one, and pleasant to read. Lord Hornette, M.P. for North Hiveshire, the heir to this fine heritage of square-headedness and honour, was small and lemon-coloured, but well-pleased with himself, as it beseems a future Duke to be. He was not meek or shy, and it was said that his temper was not of the best; but his digestion was good; he could ride straight at a five-barred gate, kill steadily with both barrels, and keep as much good humour as was necessary for those who neither begged of nor bothered him. His brother was conspicuously unlike him; for while Lord Hornette looked like a portable edition of ducal principles, Lord Dolly Drone was a folio volume of more homely maxims. He was six foot high, proportionably broad, fat, and healthy; and a joke was current that when the two brothers met, the younger noted complacently how much the elder had diminished since their last meeting, and wondered whether he would go on diminishing in this way till there was

nothing of him left. But this was a calumny, for Dolly Drone was very fond of his brother, and Lord Hornette reciprocated the sentiment when the weather was wet and he had no one else to talk to.

Nothing much need be said about Lord Chevy-chase, who was a gracefully arrogant type of the half-educated Marquis, lately released from school, and holding a commission in the Guards. He was handsome, gay, and fast; had 100,000*l.* a year, kept a yacht, a racing stud, a theatre, and a four-in-hand, and was head of the great fox-hunting and place-hunting House of Keane-Forester. This made him cousin of Ladies Beaujolais and Coralmere, who were *nées* Keane-Forester, though of a younger and indigent branch. Lord Chevy-chase sat next to Violet Carol, and it was evident to any observer that he was soon about to lay his coronet and liberty at her tiny feet. Violet was the *replica* picture of her sister Zellie—one of those blue-eyed, sweet-tempered, bright-witted nymphs of the aristocracy, whom to see is to adore—and to adore with hopes of success—bliss.

So much for the nobler guests at Elmwood; but Sir Charles Cautious and the Reverend Nonus Nines, who represented commonalty and intellect at the board, played the part of salt and pepper in a salad. The Reverend Nonus had come to Elmwood about a lucrative living which Lord Rosemary had offered him, and which he (Mr. Nines) had journeyed from London to decline with thanks. Mr. Nines had gone out as a high wrangler at Cambridge, and had been

highly wrangling ever since. He was a leading contributor to a well-known review, and was a man whom society courted, because it is well to be on terms with reviews; also, Mr. Nines being a fellow of his college, a possessor of private means, and a member of good clubs, was independent of patronage, and could wait without trouble till the time came for his running the usual curriculum of honours as a University preacher, a Regius professor, a canon, and probably a bishop. Pending this consummation, Mr. Nines hunted out the books of foreign *savants*, and refuted them; he made the minds of Church dignitaries bitter by telling them not to excite themselves when militant zeal or the sense of over-importance led them to use their croziers as pen-holders; and to the public he taught in politics, literature, and religion that there is as much to be said on one side of every question as on the other. Reading Mr. Nines' articles gave one a blessed feeling of security in one's own wit—or the want of it. To tally with Mr. Nines one had only to lay down that every controversialist was intemperate, every historian ill-informed, and every theorist whatsoever injudicious. It may be added as a matter of not much consequence, that Mr. Nines was an atheist.

An atheist, too, perhaps, but one who sedulously concealed that, and every other form of heterodoxy, was Sir Charles Cautious, a man who had no enemies and had never tried to make any. He was the best dressed gentleman in England, the most facile draw-

ing-room talker, the politest social critic, one whom younger men admired, older men liked, and women doted on. About fifty years old though, he looked but forty, he had seen an immense deal of the best society in all countries, and had gathered from his experience the utmost apparent indulgence for human foibles. He was, indeed, too indulgent, for every woman was to him an angel, every rogue a poor fellow whom one shouldn't be hard upon; he made allowances for all sorts of persons who make too many allowances for themselves, and in that species of casuistry which consists in allaying the scruples of frail woman he could have floored a Jesuit. In politics he was Liberal Conservative, in religion broad, in social ethics he held that all things existing were for the best, and required no changing. So much for Sir Charles in externals.

Some of this baronet's intimate friends, however, and Mr. Nines was one of them, were aware that he was not at all the man he professed to be, for that under his polished surface lurked a detestation and bitter contempt for the institutions he affected to love and the society which he adulated, and that moreover, this detestation and contempt found vent in a private diary closed with a treble lock. Sir Charles Cautious jumped with the mood of his time, which was hypocrisy. He was all things to all men because he found this pay best; but he revenged himself for his dissimulation by recording in letters of gall his impression of the events and persons among whom he

moved, and he intended bequeathing this diary to be thrown like a bomb into society after his death. Mr. Nines often laughed in his sleeve when he saw Sir Charles pouring the most exquisite compliments into the ears of social bores or sinners, who were dissected alive in his diary; and he could laugh *en connaissance de cause*, for it had been arranged that if Sir Charles died first Mr. Nines was to be his literary executor and editor.

"So you have seen the world, Fred," said Lord Rosemary to Mayrose when Mr. Nines had muttered grace. "What was that we heard about your being arrested by the Carlists?"

"I don't know whether it was me or my luggage they arrested," laughed Mayrose. "At all events the luggage suffered most."

"Wretched hotels in Spain," remarked Lord Hornette.

"Hotels test the standard of a people's political development," observed Mr. Nines. "When you order hot water at ten and they bring it you at eleven, the people are only fit for despotism."

"And you renewed Captain Burton's feat of the pilgrimage from Mecca to Medina, did you not, Lord Mayrose?" inquired Lady Coralmere, who had been furtively examining the traveller with rather flattering attention. "Is it true that you were obliged to shave your head and drink nothing between sunrise and sunset during forty hot days?"

"I am afraid I smuggled a flask about me!" replied Mayrose, "but I nearly expiated my impiety, for there was a devout Mussulman who kept his eye on me and if I had been caught sipping I must have murdered him or he me."

"Poor fellow!" ejaculated Sir Charles Cautious.

"Who, poor fellow?" exclaimed Lady Beaujolais, vivaciously. "Don't think Sir Charles is pitying you, Lord Mayrose; he finds that there is plenty to be said for the Mussulman."

"Ah! who knows but that his only grandmother might have died the happier for knowing he had murdered a Christian!" murmured Mr. Nines, mimicking Sir Charles's amiable tones to the amusement of everybody, including his victim.

"Mr. Nines is a pitiless railer," smiled Lady Rosemary, "but we owe him a debt of thanks, for he relieved our anxieties when we heard you were traveling through Peru during the earthquakes."

"Oh but Mr. Nines spoke so absurdly, mamma," exclaimed Zellie Carol, shaking her pretty head at the clergyman, "he said that nobody was ever killed by an earthquake except those who wanted to be."

"I do confess to being sceptical as to the terrors of those earthquakes," assented Mr. Nines, "given a people addicted to contracting loans without repaying them, and one cannot but think that they regard their periodical earthquakes as the Israelites did the Jubilees, which brought them a blessed relief from their debts."

One can fancy a prudent Peruvian computing whether the next earthquake would come in time to furnish him a decent excuse for not paying for that last consignment of goods from Europe."

"This earthquake, though, appears to have been serious," piped Lord Chevychase in a young man's shrill voice; "the papers say you helped to dig out a lot of fellows."

"Yes, and they voted you a gold watch," chuckled Lord Hornette. "Nines suggested, though, that when you had half dug out the President you should have flourished the spade over his head and sworn to bury him again if he didn't promise to keep his country quiet."

"I would have buried him altogether and ruled the country in his stead," declared Lady Beaujolais with a bright laugh.

In this way the conversation bubbled on, and Mayrose could not complain that his old friends showed him any neglect. On the contrary they made much of him, as if he were an orange to be squeezed for its fresh juice's sake; but so long as the ladies were in the room the talk sparkled unsubstantially as the globules in champagne, and Mayrose could not get at what he rather impatiently wanted—the real minds of his interlocutors. It may be asked whether he expected the company to hold forth as to their opinions, laying down propositions to be debated at length and thoughtfully pondered? Not he; but the

creamy persiflage kept up for the common amusement told him nothing. It seemed to be the fashion to doubt everything and laugh at everything; to ban all earnestness of thought or action as in bad taste; and to look upon the gravest crises in the affairs of foreign nations as in no wise affecting England. Though loving women's society, Mayrose was not sorry when Lady Rosemary retired, and when the Earl set the example of drawing his chair nearer the fire and bidding the decanters circulate.

He was now alone with as select a committee of the governing class as could have been mustered together—a past Minister, two peers, three members of the House of Commons, and a mentor of public opinion, nay, one who was public opinion incarnate. So, by way of improving himself, he said—

“I have been so long absent that I know little of politics. That was a puzzling leader in this morning's ‘Times.’ Will Paramount start a policy this Session?”

“What's the use of a policy?” interrupted Lord Hornette curtly. “We watch what the other side will do, and if they trip fall on them.”

“Policy!” said Mr. Nines, lifting up his glass to the light; “policy is a word of complex meaning apt to mislead the vulgar. You hold that knife in your hand and want to know my opinion on it. I wait till you have said, ‘It's sharp,’ then I answer with conviction, ‘It's blunt.’ You pass the knife on to me,

and I look at it edgewise as you did; then it's my turn to say, 'This is a sharp knife.'"

"Mr. Nines means we have not the knife in our hands for the present," laughed Lord Rosemary, dipping his lips in Château Lafitte.

"What knife?" inquired Dolly Drone, who understood letterpress better than metaphor.

"Dolly's heavy to-night," said his noble brother, humorously; "but it's only the other side who cant about policy, and in their mouths it means that whenever they're out, they'll knock down something to get in again."

"We can't do better than follow Paramount," chimed in Lord Beaujolais with a hearty voice like a bell's. "He leads us over queer bits of country now and then, but there are no bones broken."

"And if there were, broken bones can be set," was Sir Charles's placid rejoinder.

"Well, I daresay I shall get used to your philosophy," said Mayrose, hopefully; but as he perceived that politics was to them all as a field strewn with eggs, he talked to Lord Rosemary about the latter's golden pheasants, while Mr. Nines compared notes with the rest of the company about the divers topics that agitated their respective clubs—chiefly horse topics.

"Well," said Lady Rosemary, making room for Mayrose on her sofa, as the gentlemen entered the drawing-room, where Zellie and Violet were preparing

to play a duet on the piano—"well, do you still want the keynote from me, or are you beginning to feel more in tune with our thoughts?"

"Thanks, I find I have caught the tune," smiled Mayrose, "and an easy one it is."

CHAPTER VII.

Zellie's Brother.

SIR CHARLES CAUTEIOUS kept a truthful diary; we may claim an author's privilege of peeping at what he wrote down before going to bed on the night of the above dinner:—

“*January* 15, 18—. At Elmwood; dined with Beaujolais, Chevy Chase, Hornette, Nines, and a pack of women. A great fuss about Lord Mayrose, just returned from a round of adventures abroad, which he relates with a good attempt at modesty, and which are probably all untrue. He cracked our heads with politics at dessert, and looked surprised that no one was prepared to say whether Paramount was a better political sharper than Paradyse, or just the reverse. I like the innocence of these young peers, who turn out so arrogant and cynical when they get older. However, Mayrose has good looks and agreeable manners in his favour, and might cut some figure in society if he had money. He has returned too late to marry either of the Ladies Carol, who I take it are affianced to Hornette and Chevy Chase respectively; but from what I saw at dinner I think he may be allowed to console the widowhood of rich Lady Coralmere, whose

husband, after being long stalked after by death *pede claudo*, is at last advertised to die 'without fail' in early spring. There is a shooting-party to-morrow, and I have been pressed to join it. I hate these wholesale poppings at tame birds in the company of bores; they remind one too much of the French saw, *des imbéciles massacrant des bêtes*, but I shall go if only to see Mayrose shoot a fox."

Sir Charles Cautious did not see Mayrose shoot a fox, for the gun-party was made up only of Dolly Drone, Mr. Nines, and Sir Charles himself. Lord Rosemary rode off with Zellie and Violet to pay a visit to some neighbours, attended by Lords Hornette and Chevychase. Mayrose was invited to join both parties, but he stayed behind and spent the day with Lady Rosemary.

"I think we both want to have a long chat with each other," said the Countess to him as she took his arm for a stroll through the park. "You shall come with me to my dairy, and then to the village, and we will lunch alone."

"It will remind me of old times, dear Lady Rosemary."

They were indeed both pleased to be with each other, and the concerns of the dairy were not so engrossing but that they found time to converse much as a mother and son would have done. Lady Rosemary had been more struck than she cared to conceal with the manly character, the frankness, and engaging simplicity of the young man who had come back and

was craving her patronage. He on his side was touched and charmed to meet in his gentle protectress the same unaltered and gracious affection he had always experienced from her as a boy. They walked on the grass under the avenue of trees with flocks of cawing rooks circling overhead, and soon Lady Rosemary said—

“It is a positive misfortune for you, my poor boy, that you should be a peer. You might have had so brilliant a career in the House of Commons.”

“It may seem presumptuous in me to say so,” confessed Mayrose, “but I have wished myself that I had had to carve my own way in life.”

“You can make a great name as it is,” continued Lady Rosemary; “but it must be by other means than if you had been a Commoner. If your poor father were still alive, your own merits would have been enough, but now as a peer you want money, and much of it—large landed influence especially. You know Sir Ham Pennywon?”

“He has asked me for my support in Hiveborough.”

“And you have promised it him?”

“No, I thought of refusing; but I wished for your advice.”

“I should say by all means make a friend of him—he would be a most valuable ally. His wealth is very great, they tell me.”

“Oyster-shells innumerable; but what a man!”

“We cannot always choose our helpmates, Freddy;

and then this one is honest. You must not blame him for his want of education."

"I should say his education had been excellent, especially the arithmetic."

"That's unkind. Sir Ham has been laborious and successful. He has only one child left now—a daughter."

"Heiress to all our old estates. Oh! Lady Rosemary, you are not going to tell me that I ought to marry that little bag of 'Change scrip!" and as Mayrose said this half laughingly, the sisterly kiss which Zellie Carol had given him the day before seemed to kindle back on his cheek in a blush.

Lady Rosemary reddened and looked up at him. She was very motherly with that tinge of emotion lighting up her soft eyes. It was an emotion of pride in him, for she loved him the more for his answer. Nevertheless she replied—

"I will be truthful with you, Freddy; and I confess that when I heard of Mr. Pennywon's death and of your return I thought that if you married Miss Pennywon it would be a happy thing for you. She is pretty, I hear, and well-bred—girls are educated so much alike, you know, nowadays—and then you are a man to whom any woman would devote her life. It might not have been a love-match at first, but it would have ended in love."

"Everybody seems to consider the end in our times, and to skip over the means," said Mayrose, with a sigh. "I do not know what countenance I

should keep if I met Miss Pennywon, for my lawyer, good Mr. Deedes, was driving at this idea all Sunday evening—diplomatically as he imagined.”

“I had not seen you, Freddy, when the thought occurred to me. Now you are back beside me, I feel that I did you an injury. You will find plenty of other heiresses—beautiful and noble girls—worthier of you!”

“Why heiresses, dear Lady Rosemary? I should be content with less.”

“Well, one must not be too romantic; but we must think now about the immediate present. You will see Mr. Paramount to-day, and he will be able to grow acquainted with you by Monday. He will advise you to speak in the House of Lords as soon as possible.”

“I hope we may get on as well after my speech as before it.”

“That you must contrive to do. Submit to discipline at first. You will see others besides Mr. Paramount; the Duke and Duchess of Bumblebeigh, and Colonel Dandelion, the ‘Whip,’ are coming.”

“I vaguely remember seeing Mr. Paramount when I was a boy,” observed Mayrose, “I think he spoke to me about cub-hunting.”

So in this way they saw the dairy and village, returning to lunch when the sun had melted all the silver-frosting off the tree-branches, and was making every twig glisten with a dozen diamonds. Herds of fallow-deer, forsaking the sheds which sheltered

them at the night and in the cold of morning, were trooping out to browse over the wet grass; russet squirrels scampered across the pathways and climbed, frightened, up the tree-barks; and the Pennywons lapsed out of discussion as they had done in the conversation with Mr. Deedes. But Mayrose could not quite dismiss them from his musings, for they were recurring too importunately. When, luncheon being over, Lady Rosemary withdrew to occupy herself about the rooms preparing for her great guests, Mayrose sallied out for a solitary ramble and found himself on the terrace with the six macaws, who began forthwith marking time in his honour as before. But he looked at them absently as he lit a cigar.

What was it drew him then towards the exact spot where Zellie had alighted from her horse and come towards him holding out her hands? By looking he could have found the mark of her little boot-heel imprinted in the gravel, and followed her steps to the place where he had kissed her. He did look, and stood for several minutes tracing rounds dreamily with his stick, while the smoke of his cigar floated above him in blue spirals. He had not yet moved when—just as yesterday—a sound of cantering aroused him, and once again he saw Zellie coming down the bridle-path, with Lord Hornette riding beside her. Involuntarily Mayrose turned aside behind a cluster of lilac bushes, and this time he passed unperceived. Zellie and her companion must have distanced Lord

Rosemary and Violet; and now, being near home, they drew in and their horses fell into a walk. Zellie's tinkling laughter was rippling through the air, and as the two went by, Mayrose could hear his own name pronounced.

"Upon my soul, I was jealous, Lady Zell!" said Lord Hornette, in his crisp, dry tones.

"Jealous of whom? Why Freddy is like our brother."

"Yes, but he's not your brother."

"No; that's why we treat him as if he were. Violet and I would love to be his sisters."

"Well, I should love—— and yet no, I'm glad I am not your brother, Lady Zell."

CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. Paramount.

"HE is very clever," said Lady Rosemary.

"Ah, that is a pity," answered Mr. Paramount, quietly.

"This is an epigram."

"No, a truism. Granted the possession of amiable qualities which are sure to make him friends, why should we wish him cleverness, which can only make him enemies?"

"But *would* it make him enemies?" demurred Lady Coralmere; "I am sure I prefer clever men to dull ones."

"That is a point worth discussing," rejoined Mr. Paramount with well-acted gravity. "I have known dull men who were not so in ladies' eyes, and clever men in whom the fair sex could discern no merits whatever."

"Ah, you are too deep for us, Mr. Paramount," laughed Lady Beaujolais. "Supposing we say that cleverness might enable Lord Mayrose to walk in your footsteps?"

"You would make my reply difficult. I have no fears for a man whose cause is pleaded by ladies—

therefore, whether able or not, I am confident Lord Mayrose will succeed. But for my part I rather like clever lads, who

Speak when they're spoken to,
Come when you call;
Shut the door after 'em,
And talk to the wall."

There was a little rap at the door, and a very venerable figure, that of the Duke of Bumblebeigh, darkened the threshold.

"Am I intruding? I seem to have fallen upon a conspiracy."

"No," said Mr. Paramount with a smile, "your Grace has only lighted on a Boudoir Cabal."

The discussion about Mayrose was in fact taking place in Lady Rosemary's boudoir, at the five o'clock "drum," which the chief of the Opposition graced on the afternoon of his arrival. The three Countesses, Mrs. Dandelion, wife of the "Whip," and even the Duchess of Bumblebeigh, who had never seen Mayrose, but was interested by reports of him, were arguing the young peer's claims to political preferment, and Mr. Paramount parried these attacks in the vein of pleasantry he always adopted when he saw that he should be forced to yield. It served him nothing to urge that, not being in office, he had no good gifts to distribute, for it was generally understood that his time of honour was approaching; and before dinner a promise was coaxed from him that he would study Mayrose with a view to seeing whether

that new favourite of peeresses had in him the stuff of statesmanship.

It was a very grand dinner that evening, for Elmwood when inhabited only by the family and by familiar guests and Elmwood putting on its state to receive such a visitor as Mr. Paramount were different places. All sorts of unexpected rooms broke into light. Battalions of satin chairs blazed in the rays of countless wax tapers clustering in chandeliers of crystal or gold; dining was transferred from the snug saloon of twelve to a room with a vaulted dome painted by Baudry, and with panels of Gerome and Corot; and the side-boards groaned under an array of plate worth the ransom of a king, or even of two kings, as kings go.

Mr. Paramount was not the man to disdain such pomp. If he had a weakness, it was for the surroundings which great wealth affords. Pictures, gorgeous furniture, satin *menus*, wines of rare brand, choice music, and rich hues of ladies' dresses filled his purple imagination with Oriental visions unavowed; and dreaming himself an Asian potentate, he was perhaps consoled for long exclusions from Downing Street. Birth had a lesser fascination in his eyes, for beside certain races who trace their descent from the infancy of time—and nobly record the fact in their facial lineaments—the pedigrees of modern peers are small things indeed; and in trying to persuade himself and those whom it concerned that he venerated these small things, Mr. Paramount rather overdid it.

A playful talker withal, it was only betimes that he soared into the empyrean of mystic speech understood of none save himself. But on such occasions he would quickly fold his wings and come to earth again, out of pity for the waddlers who were unable to fly with him so high. As we all of us have our secret griefs, Mr. Paramount's was doubtless the not having been born an Italian or a Frenchman, in order that he might have ruled a people worthy to comprehend him and to cleave the heavens in his train. We are not a strong-pinioned race, or, at least, we make no use of our pinions.

"Mr. Paramount, let me re-introduce to you Lord Mayrose," said Lady Rosemary, in the drawing-room; and she spoke with a voice and gesture which proved that this was not a common presentation.

Mayrose bowed, but Mr. Paramount held out his hand. Like Louis XIV., he forgot nothing, not even a school-boy with whom he had conversed about cubs. He gave Mayrose to infer that he had thought of him oftentimes and with much hopefulness; that he was pleased to see how well the promises of his boyhood had been kept; and that he augured grandly of him. All this in half-a-dozen words, and the words were mere honey; but more flies have been caught with this than with vinegar.

The next day was Sunday. The guests made two parties for church-going, and in the afternoon, after service in the village church, Mr. Paramount took Mayrose's arm and sauntered back with him through

the park. They were alone and had an hour's talk, and the chief of the Opposition began his "study."

"I hear your tour has been an eventful one; you must have found many things to admire?"

"Yes, but I was telling some one the other day that what I most admired abroad was my own country."

"Ah, there you are right! Who was that American* who wrote that if England were all the world, it would still have been worth while for the Creator to have made it, for that the only fault to find is that there is not enough room for as many as might be happy here. I suppose, though, you have not brought back a conviction of our infallibility?"

"No, I am sorry to say. It surprised me considerably to find that Englishmen, who have so much to be proud and thankful for, should be so rash in adopting the political novelties which have proved such failures in other countries."

"That comes of our national conservatism," murmured Mr. Paramount imperturbably. "We are governed more by customs than by laws, by prejudice than by principles. The man who starts a new idea among us becomes a common enemy unless he can show that he is only furbishing up a truth, or a fallacy, that was accepted hundreds of years ago. When a statesman has the ingenuity to do this and so endorse subversive novelties with the sanction of the Bible, he leads us anywhither. We are afraid to walk

* Nathaniel Hawthorne.

forward into a ditch, we would run *backward* into an abyss."

Mayrose did not know whether he ought to laugh at the statesman's placid tone.

"We certainly seem to have a wonderful contempt for the lessons of experience," he said, "I remember in Cicero an exhaustive argument against the ballot, but it has had little effect on the House of Commons."

"No, Cicero would not have been a success in these times," said Mr. Paramount. "He would have sat on a cross-bench between Earls Russell and Grey, and been derided by the Liberal papers as an effete Whig. We do not wish that the patriotism of our public men should be exuberant."

"More's the pity," submitted Mayrose. "Do you not think there might be less harm, if, whilst imitating the democratic fallacies which are a source of weakness to our neighbours, we patriotically borrowed some of the military spirit which makes our neighbours strong? Judging by what I have seen abroad, it is high time England resorted to general military service, to safeguard her independence and that of the colonies she is civilising."

"I see you have reflected, and possess that earnestness which leads to great things," answered Mr. Paramount, with paternal flattery, "but before England sets up a national army which would render her the mightiest Empire in the world, you would have to convince her that she is not only at present the weakest but exposed to the dangers which have in all times beset

feeble states, and this our people in their self-complacency decline to admit. An Englishman regards himself and his country as exceptions to Nature's laws."

"It strikes me, there could be no harm in trying to persuade him to the contrary."

"Assuredly, such a task would be worthy of the patriot who proposed it to himself," answered Mr. Paramount, demurely. "But my dear young friend, a man must expect hard work who swims against the stream!"

After this Mayrose entered—to use popular jargon—into the potentiality of placemanship. It had been understood that Mr. Paramount had visited Elmwood for the purpose of conferring with his principal followers as to the line of tactics to be pursued in the forthcoming session; and in the judicious way peculiar to himself he did confer as to the mode in which Mr. Paradyse might be discomfited. When Mr. Paramount conferred he did so by explaining, with no lack of periphrasis, why he had not made up his mind, or, if he had made up his mind, he gave out his plans in instalments—one piece to-day, another piece some days later, for they were plans which needed to be digested at leisure—seldom plans that could be swallowed at a gulp. Mayrose was admitted to several conferences, at which Mr. Paramount finally announced that after mature reflection, he had concluded to plan nothing.

From this time Colonel Dandelion did not hesitate to treat Mayrose as a depositary of State secrets, and

went the length of confiding to him his preference for snipe over woodcock. He was a bustling Whip was the Colonel, who had lost much of his hair but none of his energy in thinking about the public weal; and his friendship was a testimonial of dignity, for like ivy he only stuck to high walls. Mayrose, thanks to him, grew to feel that he was in the path of preferment, that under the fostering wing of Lady Rosemary and with the other two pretty Countesses supporting him with their small but strong hands, he had only to deliver a few solid speeches, eschew idealism and zeal, and he would come in for something nice at the next distribution of loaves and fishes, not unlikely an under-secretaryship. In the course of three days he became ripely acquainted with Mr. Paramount, and that astute leader of men with him. Without seeming to do so, the chief of the Opposition gave him several hints about political conduct; and benevolently advised him to master as soon as possible some topic engrossing the public mind, say the blue-books on the treaty with King Cocoanib. It was inevitable that there should be debates on the treaty and subsequent war with that African potentate, but if Mayrose mastered the subject, he might worry the Colonial Secretary in the House of Lords with a demand for more papers, and luminous criticisms generally. Thus said Mr. Paramount, and when he went away on the Tuesday afternoon he shook Mayrose very affectionately by the hand and recurring to the Cocoanib question, promised to send documents of special in-

formation, to the end that the Colonial Secretary might have no shield to cover him.

"You have quite won his heart," said Lady Rosemary that same evening.

"He is a perplexing man," answered Mayrose. "I think he would be the greatest of statesmen if he were free to act; but he is a Richelieu in hand-cuffs—he is afraid to express convictions, and consequently instils no enthusiasm."

CHAPTER IX.

In which Mary Pennywon receives a Camelia.

WHILE the welfare of England was thus being cared for at Elmwood, Sir Ham Pennywon was not unmindful of Parliament or of his Oyster Shells. Two days after the funeral of Micah Pennywon the Oyster-Shell Company at its half-yearly meeting declared a dividend of fifteen per cent., and the shares rose in a manner which much comforted Sir Ham in his affliction. He called on Mr. Deedes after the meeting, and remained closeted with him for two hours. Then he returned to Penny by the express which leaves London at five; and on the following morning after breakfast set out alone in his black clothes, for what he called a country walk.

He was not generally a walking man. Nature had not intended that he should be when she gave him a pair of legs round as cylinders, and waist that overjuted those legs to an extent unfavourable to locomotion. But the Prime Warden of the Sausage-Makers reckoned with his head, not with his legs; and his head on this particular morning took his legs in the direction of Springfield Park. Once arrived here, he steadily reconnoitred the lodges; passing his hand over the walls to see whether they were stone or

stucco—they were stucco; and went the length of climbing on to the hedge bank opposite to see whether the roofs were in good repair. Then he pulled the bell, which had a buck's foot for its handle, and obtained admittance.

"I should like to visit this place," he said to a tidy woman who swung the gate back on its hinges.

"Yes, sir, if you please," answered the tidy woman closing the gate behind him.

Springfield was open to all visitors. Archæologists frequently came there to burrow, and artists to sketch; and those who pleased might stroll through the apartments under the guidance of the housekeeper. The tidy woman directed Sir Ham to walk straight in front of him, and to ring at the main entrance when he reached the hall; which things Sir Ham did, but not till he had whiled away an hour in the park scrutinising the turf, the trees, the gravel, as he had done the lodges. Once or twice he paused, poked a chestnut-tree or oak with his umbrella, and looked up into the branches. Then he walked further on, picked a piece of moss off some bark with his black gloves, and turned it over as if it were a sample of something purchasable. When he had spent his hour in this way he made as though he would go back and count all the trees one by one; but there were too many of them, so with his web-footed gait he struck across a piece of lawn, examined two statues—one of a faun, the other of a wood nymph—which seemed to strike him as vain productions, and passed into the

quadrangle. Springfield was built on the plan of University colleges, which was that of most noble demesnes erected in the sixteenth century. To the right of the quadrangle was a chapel, to the left a banqueting-hall with stained glass windows; and the central block of three-storied buildings which connected these edifices contained the dwelling apartments. In the centre of the grass-plot that enlivened the quadrangle rose a grey marble fountain crowned with a circle of dolphins and a Naiad with an urn, all in bronze. There was no water in the fountain, the marble basin had long been full of dry weeds, and the bronze was verdigrised; but some workmen were busy cleaning it with scrapers, and had dug a conduit over the plot. Sir Ham inquired, and learned that the leaden pipes, which had suffered from disuse, were being mended. This reply seemed to satisfy him; he ascended the steps that led to the front door, and rang as he had been enjoined. Another tidy woman answered the summons, but this time one in flustering silk and smart cap-strings, who looked as if the house were to all intents hers, and who was known to the workmen as Mrs. Bussleigh.

"I am Sir Ham Pennywon," said the knight, but without exhibiting his card; "and I should like to see all that is to be seen if it ain't too much trouble."

"Please step in, sir," answered Mrs. Bussleigh, respectfully; "his lordship is away at present, but you will find things as if he were living here, for we expect him back soon."

This was what Sir Ham wanted. He strode up to a coat of armour, and tapped it with his finger. Like the entrance hall of Elmwood, which the Warden of the Sausage-Makers had not seen, that of Springfield was baronially decorated with hunting and military trophies; but the shields and helmets predominated over the stags' heads, for the Springfields had been a long line of soldiers; the present Lord Mayrose being indeed the only one who had never worn a sword. This fact Mrs. Bussleigh explained to Sir Ham at once, for it was an item that was communicated to the visitor as soon as he had crossed the threshold, and just before stepping into the renowned library that lay to the right.

"What's this?" asked Sir Ham, thrusting his finger through a round hole that disfigured one of the breastplates. His apparent meaning was, "Why don't they mend this hole?"

"That, sir, must have been worn by some poor fellow who was killed. These are retainers' armours. In the armoury upstairs you will see the breastplates and helmets worn by his lordship's ancestors. The cuirass of the first Lord Mayrose, killed at Worcester, is riddled right through. Another Lord Mayrose died at Fontenoy, sir, and we have his coat. The fifth Lord Mayrose—he was an admiral—was killed in the action with the French off Ushant. I will show you the cocked hat he wore, sir."

Sir Ham seemed in no wise hasty to view the cocked hat or any other of the articles of apparel

which had been injured by war; but he displayed an uncommon patience in examining the furniture, paintings, window-curtains, looking-glasses, china ornaments, everything down to the fireirons in the apartment. When he came to a sofa he sat down on it; when he reached the beds he pummelled the mattresses gently with his fist, and heard with pleasure the assurance, "All feather, sir." There was no end to the chambers, unlocked one after the other, and all ready to be habited so soon as a few logs should be set to blaze in the capacious chimneys. After that smash to which we have once or twice alluded, Springfield had not passed through the hands of that godson of Ruin, the Auctioneer. Enough had been saved to prevent this desecration, and it continued to be the fit and splendid residence of a great noble. Sir Ham did not complain of the time it took to tread over the acres of carpet, pause at all the pictures, and be initiated into the history of the countless heirlooms. When he was introduced into the library, walled from roof to flooring with valuable books—as to their value he knew nought, but he judged by the bindings—when he paced the chapel, and found the stalls and pews were of solid oak; when the doors of the banqueting-hall, groaning back to let him pass, showed him tables running in long rows as if ready for the feasting of a city, and the vault of chestnut wood in which, as the housekeeper explained, no spiders had ever spun their webs, he grunted softly with some significance; and when finally Mrs. Bussleigh apprised him that the plate was

safe, and lodged in the Bank of England, he ventured on a smile. He did more, and gave Mrs. Bussleigh a sovereign, adding—

“It may be that I’ll bring my family here one of these days, perhaps to-morrow, if it ain’t inconvenient.”

“No inconvenience whatever, if you please, sir,” answered Mrs. Bussleigh, curtseying; and after this Sir Ham went his way.

He would have liked to ride home, for he had seen what he wished to see; and his legs being no longer sustained by the settled purpose of his head, gave him some trouble over the five miles that separated him from Penny. But he strutted sturdily, solacing himself with a pause and a wheeze now and then; and as soon as he had reached home sought out the room where his wife and daughter were working mournfully, having none of the excitement of oyster-shells to lighten their bereavement.

Sir Ham fastened his smooth, gooseberry eyes on them.

“It ain’t no use being downcast, my dears,” said he, taking up his position on the hearthrug, and speaking with a slight quaver, for he had not yet had time to get used to the sight of the crape dresses, and every time he looked upon them his heart twinged. “We must bear up, my dears,” continued he, drawing off his black gloves methodically, and with some labour by reason of the fatness of his finger-joints.

His daughter Mary, a pretty girl of nineteen, with prim little collar and cuffs, rose and kissed him.

"God bless ye, Mary, and what should you say to a visit to Springfield?" proceeded Sir Ham, stroking the girl's hair, which she wore neatly plaited down, not crimped, as the fashion was and is. "You must pick up your colour again, and the sooner the better, for life ain't to be spent in crying. We'll go to-morrow."

"Dearie me, we couldn't a-bear to see company yet, Ham," murmured Lady Pennywon, who was a mild and distraught but plentiful person like her husband, and had sold saveloys behind his counter when he had set up in business in Pickle Alley, Cornhill.

"There won't be company, Jane, and if there were it would only be Lord Mayrose, who came to poor Mike's burying—a gentlemanly young man. But he's away. I only want to show you the place just to cheer you a bit. It'll be better than doing those slippers all day."

"They're for the parson," sighed Lady Pennywon, looking at her work, which was scarlet, yellow, and most other colours, intermixed with splashes of beads for relief.

Mary Pennywon was accustomed to do what her father and mother bade her without inventing objections. She had never seen Lord Mayrose, though she had heard of him rather repeatedly of late, and there was no reason why she should not go to see Springfield if it so pleased Sir Ham. She was a rather positive little person, with nut-brown eyes, and a shrewd

smile, who had been educated at what was styled a fashionable young ladies' academy at Brighton, and she had never known her parents in the sausage-selling period of their career. Being better taught than they, and full of accomplishments of which they could not even pronounce the names, it would have been natural and filial that she should have felt politely impatient in their society; but her training—or rather certain qualities of heart which directed the same—had produced just the contrary effect. Nothing was more attractive to her than to hear from her mother how that shop in Pickle Alley had been managed. Sir Ham, who had caught them once or twice discussing reminiscences of how much the black-puddings used to fetch and where the brawns used to stand, had interdicted the undesirable topic. But his prohibition only led to the exercise of that greater prudence which devolves on conspirators, and the choice of hours when the various commodities that make up a thriving pork store might be treated of with comfort became one of the preoccupations of their lives. In expatiating on the trials and triumphs of pigs'-meat selling, good Lady Pennywon kindled into savoury eloquence, and if Miss Mary had been allowed to shape out her own destiny she would certainly not have aspired to marry a bishop or a dragoon, as the other young ladies at the Brighton school, but have modestly claimed the white apron and the carving-knife which her mother had discarded long years ago, when Sir Ham had waxed rich and worshipful.

It happened, therefore, that the sights which had so much moved Sir Ham passed before his daughter's eyes like a rather wearisome panorama. The heavy landau of the Pennywons jolted the knight, his lady, and Miss Mary to the entrance hall, behind the fountain still mending; and again Mrs. Bussleigh appeared with jingling keys at her waist and profuse curtseying. But Mary thought Penny a finer place than Springfield; and Lady Pennywon derived no gratification from the breastplates. Sir Ham sat upon the sofas as before, and pummelled the mattresses in the bedrooms, adding of his own authority this time: "All feather, Mary." But Mary repeated that the chairs at Penny were much smarter than these in faded tapestry, and wondered naïvely how anyone could sleep in those huge beds without dreaming of ghosts. Thus they went the whole round of the house with languor, and were emerging from the dining-hall after what seemed to Mary a truly interminable review of old gim-cracks, when at last—and to the no little relief of Sir Ham, whose features had been lengthening gruesomely—his daughter evinced signs of admiration. A conservatory full of rare camelias bordered one whole side of the garden that stood behind the hall, and Mary could see the graceful flowers rearing their heads in bunches of white, scarlet, and pink through the glass doors.

Camelias always have a fascination for women, and a cynic might say that there is some analogy between the showy, lithe, brittle flower which fritters

away at the touch and the brilliant fickle nature of the frail sex.

"Oh, what lovely flowers!" exclaimed Mary. "I should almost like to have a white one to carry away."

"Unfortunately I've not the key, miss. It's only the gardener and his lordship who have keys," apologised Mrs. Bussleigh. "If I had known you had been coming, the gardener should have been here——"

"If you like camelias, Mary, I'll buy some for you in Covent Garden," interrupted fatherly Sir Ham; and the family grouped themselves round the door, Lady Pennywon wondering in her inner soul how much such flowers would cost the dozen. But the day was not to pass off without Mary's innocent longing being appeased, and that in an unexpected way, for while she was remarking that the camelias were as fine as if made of wax, which was saying a great deal, a light tread broke on the gravel and Sir Ham, who had pressed his nose against the panes, turned round uttering an exclamation: "Jane—Mary, here's Lord Mayrose himself."

Mayrose had in fact ridden over from Elmwood to see if there were any letters awaiting him, or matters to be attended to, and also to bring back the Blue-book on that treaty with Coccoanib of which no copy could be found at Elmwood. He was not going to stay above an hour, but had passed through the garden to order a bouquet of his camelias to be made

up for Lady Rosemary. He was in hunting-boots, carried a whip under his arm, and had drawn the key of the conservatory from his pocket, when Sir Ham and his belongings loomed on his view. Quickly he put on a kind expression, and threw away his inseparable cigar.

"My lord, we took the great liberty," stuttered the Warden of the Sausage-Makers, bustling forward with noticeable radiance.

"You did quite right, and I only regret I was not at home to receive you," answered Mayrose, politely lifting his hat. And shaking hands with Sir Ham, he advanced towards the ladies.

"Lady Pennywon, my lord, and my daughter, Mary—Mary, Viscount Mayrose," said the knight, whose keen eyes it did not escape that the cigar which the peer had thrown away was well-nigh a whole one—a token of civility which puzzled him.

"I see you were admiring my camelias," said Mayrose. "Will you allow me to show them you?" and he turned the key in the lock. "I think my gardener is a little proud of his conservatory."

"Pass in, Jane—pass in, Mary; it's very kind of your lordship," reiterated Sir Ham. "We were just enjoying ourselves in this beautiful place as a bit of comfort after our troubles."

"You will always be welcome, I am sure. But did not I hear Miss Pennywon wish for a flower?" Saying which he broke off the fairest within reach, bowed, and handed it to her.

This is why Mary Pennywon when she rode home had a white camelia in her lap; and why Mayrose, on his way back to Elmwood later in the afternoon, looked a trifle more absent than when he had come thence in the morning.

CHAPTER X.

A Chapter of Accidents.

IT was a hazard that had taken Mayrose to Springfield; but it was not a hazard which made him say nothing to Lady Rosemary about his meeting with Mary Pennywon. Without being able to account for his reticence, he felt that he would keep his counsel on this subject even if he were talking confidentially with the Countess. There was a spice of ludicrousness in the chance which brought these Pennywons across his path at every corner. Sir Ham was beginning to appear to him in his dreams, and he was certain that he should blush if Lady Rosemary asked him, with her searching and rather humorous eyes, whether he found Miss Pennywon pretty. For he had found her pretty, and his surprise had been considerable at encountering a girl at once graceful and unpretending under the protection of the sausage-maker. However, Mayrose had for several days no opportunity for private talk with the Countess. Mr. Paramount gone, Lord and Lady Beaujolais, Lady Coralmere, Lord Chevychase, and the Drones remained at Elmwood, and a week was passed in festivities which it required all Lady Rosemary's leisure to super-

intend. As the family were to quit Elmwood at the opening of the Session, the moment had come for liquidating the arrears of civilities due to small county folks; and for seven days an interminable procession of magistrates, vicars, doctors, and mayors, with their feminine encumbrances, filed through the dining-room at Elmwood. Lady Rosemary was the more anxious to leave none of them dinnerless, as she wished Mayrose to pick up the broken threads of past acquaintanceship with these sometimes wearisome but always useful persons.

In going to Springfield Mayrose had purposed to bring back with him the Blue-book on the treaty with King Cocoanib. As is most just, Blue-books are sent regularly to peers throughout each Session, and some five hundredweight of them would have accumulated during our friend's absence, had not his butler profitably sold them to a tobacconist for three-half-pence a pound as soon as they became twelve months old. The volume on King Cocoanib however, having been issued at the close of the last Session, lay with leaves uncut at Springfield, whither it had been forwarded from town with the rest of the luggage; and Mayrose returned with it strapped on his saddle, being minded to study its contents at Elmwood, as Mr. Paramount had suggested. But this proved to be not so easy. Except during odd half-hours in his dressing-room, and a winkful hour in bed before extinguishing his candle, he had scarcely ten minutes in the day at his disposal. Lady Beaujolais, under

pretext of conversing with him about his affairs, and giving him good advice, talked with him for whole mornings about hers. Romantic Lady Coralmere, who loved expeditions to tumble-down ruins, sandpits, and waterfalls, and would drive to these places of interest in a brisk pony-chaise, with Lady Beaujolais beside her, and enlist Mayrose to sit behind and make them laugh all the way. With both ladies he had become a prime favourite. They educated him in the private chronicles of society, which gave him the notion that everybody and everything were just the reverse of what they were popularly supposed to be, and when he was out of the sight of these obliging instructresses then Zellie and Violet tugged at his sleeves, and were for taking him out to fish, visit, or follow the hounds.

All this was charming enough, but at the period we have reached it was just beginning to dawn insensibly upon Mayrose that, whilst his occasional assiduities towards Lady Coralmere—or rather hers towards him—caused a lengthening of the features of his friend Dolly Drone, so his unceremonious friendliness with Zellie jarred visibly on the nerves of Lord Hornette. This young earl was all nerves. His impatient features had a trick of contracting into frowning zigzags when he was crossed, and Mayrose too often perceived these uncomplimentary distortions on them. He had not forgotten the gallant words he had overheard behind the lilac bushes, and he noticed that since that ride with Lord Hornette Zellie had

left off calling him Freddy. This would have been natural in any case, for it was hardly possible or even desirable that familiarity born in childhood should continue now that he and Lady Rosemary's children had attained to what are styled years of discretion. Still, Violet called him Freddy as before, nor did punctilious Lord Hornette urge any objection to it so far as she was concerned. Now as man is a whimsical being, Mayrose wished somehow, without caring to explain the wish, that the heir of the Bumblebeighs had read his lesson on the proprieties to the younger instead of the elder sister.

Things were in this pass when two or three mornings after his excursion to Springfield, and before the prim little features of Mary Pennywon had yet had time to grow confused in his memory, Mayrose on coming down to breakfast was waylaid by this younger sister, who was dressed in her riding-habit, and ran out from the library to stop him. Her well-cut jacket fitted her as if she had been moulded in it; she had a light-blue kerchief round her neck, and the rich clusters of her auburn hair were massed under a small hat and veil set atilt in the most knowing way imaginable.

"I have lain in ambush for you, Freddy," said she, laughing, and putting the gold tip of her little riding whip on his arm; "you must come and hunt with us this morning."

"But I am not rigged out for hunting, Violet," answered he, surveying her with admiration as if she

were a bright picture transferred alive from one of Herring's best sporting cracks.

"Oh, but it will take you no time to put on your things," she replied, holding up her long skirt under which her tiny boots and one silver spur could be seen. "The hounds meet at Kingschase, and it's always the best run of the season. Then you've given enough of your time to Lady Beaujolais and Lady Coralmere; Zellie and I want to have something of you."

"Are not Hornette and Chevychase or Dolly going with you?"

"Not Lord Chevychase. He has to go to London on business, and Dolly Drone is no fun for me unless he would tumble off his horse, which he never does," pouted Violet; "as for Lord Hornette he speaks only to Zellie. Do come!"

Mayrose had no objections to offer. His tailor had sent him down a suit of hunting things, and his bootmaker a triumphant pair of tops which it was a pity to leave idling on their trees. Besides, he had not hunted for so long that he was doubtful of the figure he should cut in the field, and like a resolute fellow as he was, he desired to allay his doubts without much delay.

"I think I'll obey you, Violet," said he, glancing at his watch, and only hesitating long enough to hear the invitation repeated; "but if I get broken you'll have to bring home the bits."

"You never came down in your life," protested

Violet, incredulously. "Go and dress, and we'll wait breakfast for you. You're the same dear fellow as you ever were. You always do what you're told."

Accordingly in an hour from that time Mayrose in new red attire was riding to meet on one of Lord Rosemary's bravest hunters. It was a tepid morning, of the sort dear to sportsmen, with a southerly breeze driving clouds over the sky like flocks of grey sheep. Kingschase was too near to Elmwood to render a covert hack necessary, and on the road Mayrose was enabled to convince himself that he and his steed were likely to keep on good terms—a piece of conviction only procurable when the rider knows he is master of his beast, and not his beast master of him. Dolly Drone, who rode fifteen stone, and had a well-used coat, the dye of which, about the skirt, was as mashed-cranberries, gave his friend sagacious hints as to how divers fences were to be taken in a stiffish part of the country for which the Kingschase foxes had a predilection. "You see," said he, "it's just like riding down a staircase, for they're all drop-fences, and the further you get towards Kingschase the worse it becomes. That's why we call it such a good country." Dolly was glad of Mayrose's presence, for when riding with Violet he was bound by his chivalry to gallop by her throughout the day; and this was tedious to his spirit, seeing that he loved to pound along by himself at a pace not much slower than steeple-chasing. Lord Hornette never left Zellie's side, and Mayrose's presence or absence was a matter of

no moment to him, for he could ride with the best, and when he had a lady under his charge he monopolised her. On this day, however, it seemed as if a spell had lighted on the two brothers, for at the minute of reaching the meet Lord Hornette was suddenly seized with a cramp which made his face twinge, and shot out his left leg straight ahead of him like a railway signal. He was liable to these seizures, which in nowise daunted his pluck, but moved him to vigorous imprecations when there were no ladies within earshot. Zellie reined in, and uttered a slight cry of alarm.

"It's nothing," groaned the earl, between two spasms, and making a gesture to allay Zellie's fears as she questioned him with concern.

"It's that devilled pheasant at breakfast this morning," cried honest Dolly Drone, cantering up. "I told you last year, man; it always plays tricks with you."

"Just help me to get off, Doll!" gasped Lord Hornette shooting at his imaginative brother a glance which would have riddled the latter through had Dolly been susceptible to eye-artillery; and Lord Beaujolais trotting up at that minute with a squadron of other sportsmen who had been attracted by the incident, they were all profuse in advising the earl to walk about for a few moments, and to stamp his foot if he could, which as it happened he couldn't. He stood leaning with all his weight between Dolly's stout arms, and thumping splenetically at his thigh, which

felt, he said, as if all the bones had got tied in a knot. Dolly repeated it must be the devilled pheasant, but some of the other riders had known tea produce these effects, and Lord Beaujolais stated that nothing suited him so well as a glass of claret before hunting. It was a scene full of anxiety.

But meanwhile the hounds had gone to work, and as foxes abounded they rapidly unearthed one, and started in pursuit.

The "whips" huskily bawled "Forrard then!" Lord Beaujolais, who had his Master's duties to perform, turned at the cry, flung the patient a parting word of cheer as one pitches sixpence to a beggar, and was no more seen; and the other riders surrounding Lord Hornette tossed him similar words, then scattered away in an instant like so many red leaves in a high wind.

"We can't leave you; we will see you home," said Zellie, who suffered sincerely to see her cramped companion biting his lips in the racking effort to put his leg straight.

But Lord Hornette was too fine a gentleman to spoil sport—above all, ladies' sport.

"No; please ride on, Lady Zell," he stammered, with a wry smile. "It's almost over now. Two grooms will take care of me."

"It looks so cruel to abandon you" exclaimed Violet, whose chestnut mare was curvetting and straining towards the hounds, with nostrils agape.

"I shall be all right in a minute, thanks, and I'll

follow you," repeated Lord Hornette, whose cramp now seemed in effect to be subsiding. "Mayrose, please see to Lady Zell." And as Dolly Drone was renewing his lamentations about the devilled pheasant, his affectionate brother cut him short with an order which admitted of no reply. They waited another minute to see that all danger was really past, and then, whilst the earl was reviving, with a groom to hold up each of his elbows, Mayrose, Zellie, Violet, and Dolly Drone galloped after the rest of the field, and galloped hard to make up for lost time.

It has been said that Mayrose had done nothing in this way since his Cambridge days; and hunting is of all games that in which a man is liable to grow most rusty from non-practice. Hunting requires a fabric of qualities of which nerve is the mere groundwork, for it is not enough to ride straight or to be well screwed in the saddle. If a man cannot nurse his horse, gauge the amount of wind and muscle in him, and regulate his pace accordingly; if he cannot put himself into the animal's skin, breathe with his breath, and throb with his pulses, then a long run with a fast pack may bring him surprises more exciting than welcome. The Kingschase country was one which bristled with obstacles that to an average rider would have seemed vile, and to a foreigner downright murderous. The land sloped as Dolly had said, and in parts was so steep that a beer-barrel set rolling would have careered along by itself till stopped by one of the numerous staked hedges. Mayrose had never

hunted over such a course before, and any experienced eye that had watched him start would have predicted small things of him, for, as in his driving so in his riding, he used up all the breeze in his horse, spinning him along as if his own dash and courage were more than enough for the pair of them. However for the first forty minutes his sinewy hunter seemed quite content with the prospect of affairs; and Mayrose covered his ground splendidly, with Zellie at his bridle to smile to and encourage him. He had fancied—though on second thoughts he rejected the idea—that she had brightened at having to ride with him instead of with Lord Hornette, and at all events she appeared more at ease with her old playmate than in the earl's company. There was a lithe gracefulness in her horsemanship which dazzled her companion. She flew over hedges like a bird, weighing not an ounce on the reins with her clever little hands. When flakes of wet clay from the ditches splashed over her habit, when the moist soil of ploughed fields thudded up in clouds around her face, when brambles seemed to clutch at her and the wind to tear at her, she laughed merrily as if fear and she had never met.

“Hold on, old man; your pace is too hot,” cried Dolly Drone, drawing alongside of Mayrose, and with Violet close to him. Dolly Drone never shirked pace by himself, but he practised moderation with ladies.

“It's not too fast,” panted Zellie, keeping her habit down with her whip to prevent it from ballooning; and Violet, whose lips were apart, and whose eyes

brimmed with the speed, cried as her gamblesome mare bounded under her, "Don't check us! We want Freddy to be in at the death."

But Freddy was not fated to figure at the death this time, for the fox, who was an old hand, led the hounds a dance of an hour and twenty minutes, and long before his capture Mayrose's mount was out of the running. Dolly Drone and Violet, who had kept behind at first, choosing their line of ground scientifically, passed by them; then others whom Mayrose and Zellie had overlapped and outstripped came up smoothly and went ahead, till at length Mayrose, to his confusion, saw himself with Zellie at the tail of the field, and only the confirmed laggards behind. A few of these had dismounted, and were examining their saddle-girths; others thought their horses had cast a shoe—the old stories, in short, of men who have had enough of it, and Mayrose chafed to be in their company. He tried the spurs, but his horse only quickened in a floundering way and at this juncture there came a sturdy hedge, looming up with signs of a ditch beyond. Mayrose, already breathless, threw a glance at Zellie's horse—

"Can you take that hedge, or shall we turn off and look for a gate?"

"I can take it," gasped Zellie, as audibly as the wind, which was making a jew's-harp of her little teeth, would permit. Her horse was in a better condition than Mayrose's, and besides, she was too eager to be

prudent. Lord Hornette had never left her to decide these questions for herself.

"Then I ought to do it," muttered Mayrose, doggedly, for he reasoned that what a lady's horse could do his ought to do, and with another dig of the spurs he bolted onwards to show Zellie the way. The hedge, though, was a nasty one, and the ditch beyond even nastier. It would have been a stiff jump at the outset of a run; with a tired horse it was a pure man-trap, and Mayrose's horse, guessing the peril, swerved abruptly, and turned tail. This was ominous, and should have warned Mayrose that an open gate is a good friend in need; but he had that indomitable, yet not unkind, firmness which insists on obedient service. So without using the spurs, but patting his horse on the neck, he brought him straight again, and this time the noble beast rose, plunged desperately at the obstacle with all the remnant of strength in him, but was only enabled to clear half the distance. He came down splashing with his forefeet on the ditch's bank, stumbled, and shot Mayrose half a dozen yards into the field beyond. Then, rid of his load, he kicked back the mud and water, and scrambled out placidly.

Mayrose was lying like a scarlet heap, and the fall had been heavy enough to knock all the life out of an ordinary body. But temperance, soberness, and chastity seemed to have made his bones of india-rubber, for, though rudely shaken, he was not even insensible. Stumbling quickly on one knee, he raised

his hands, and shouted to Zellie not to take the leap. He knew the spirited girl but little, if he thought she would obey him in such a moment. She had seen him roll over on his face, and, watching him try to rise, had perceived that he could not regain his feet, and was pressing his hand to his forehead. Without an instant's hesitation she turned, set her horse firmly at the break-neck fence, cleared it, and stood breathless by Mayrose's side. Three or four labourers, at work in an adjoining field, had hobbled down a bank, and were scurrying towards the scene of the disaster, and one of the number had valiantly run after the horse, who was shaking his ears peacefully, with no thought of flying away.

"Zellie! Zellie! Why did you do that!" stammered Mayrose, still on his knees and with affectionate reproach, for he saw she was pale as the white collar round her throat; even her lips were blanched.

"Are you hurt, Freddy?" was her only answer, as she rapidly dismounted without any assistance, then ran forward and tried to raise him by herself.

"No, no, thanks—only shaken; but it was worse than a second fall to see you expose yourself like that." The labourers, throwing up huge clods under their shoes, had reached him by this time, and were setting him on his legs. One of them pawed him to see that there were no bones broken.

"I am sure, though, you are hurt," faltered Zellie, holding him under the arms, and trembling in every limb. "If you please fetch some water," she entreated

of the labourers, feeling at the same time in Mayrose's pocket for his flask.

"There's my cottage hard by, mum," replied the man who was pawing; "but there's nought the matter wi' 'un. Coom up, zur!"

There was, in truth, nought the matter. The cropper had been a sharp one, and Mayrose felt as if his funny-bone had been crushed, and as if needles and pins were tingling to his finger-tips; also his head had a light sensation, as though its roof were gone. But after five minutes this giddiness wore off, and then, propped by Zellie on one side and by the countryman on the other, he found no difficulty in reaching the cottage. Here Zellie's anxiety should have decreased, but it did not, and the wistful expression in her eyes was very different to that which had come there when Lord Hornette had been writhing in his cramp torments. It flashed on Mayrose at this juncture that, in alluding some days before to a mild gentleman—one Mr. Buttercombe—who had come to grief in some turnips, she had laughed derisively at him, because, being only shaken, he had not climbed into the saddle again and finished the run, for both Zellie and Violet were generally pitiless towards want of pluck.

"That horse must think me a muff," shivered Mayrose, as the cottager deposited him in a Windsor arm-chair. "I shall have to beg his pardon before riding him home."

"Oh, but you mustn't think of riding him home!"

exclaimed Zellie, almost sobbing, for she had noticed that one of Mayrose's red sleeves was torn from elbow to shoulder, and she was putting her little hands into the rent, to see if there was any blood. "We must send to Elmwood for a doctor and a carriage, and you must lie down, Freddy. But perhaps there's a doctor in the village?" added she, addressing the crowd of bumpkins around her in a supplicating tone.

"No; come; Zellie, I assure you I want no doctor," averred Mayrose, standing up unaided. "My elbow is only grazed. I shall feel like Mr. Buttercombe if you spoil me."

"Oh! how can you speak of Mr. Buttercombe! He was not hurt at all." Now, Mr. Buttercombe had lighted on his hat, which had been crushed like a biffin, and the mud of many turnips had entered his eyes. However, when it was definitely seen that the rent in the coat-sleeve was the sum total of injury, and when Mayrose, with a laugh, struck out his arms obediently in all directions to prove that he had full command of them, Zellie at last consented to be pacified. The cottager's wife brought a mug of hot water, into which—her knowledge of remedies being naïvely British—she poured full half of the brandy-flask, and Mayrose was forced by Zellie to drink this fiery dram of comfort, much against his will. The entire feminine contingent of the village, with a clump of corduroyed boys, had turned out to stare at the two horses which the labourers were holding, and the

boys were flattening their noses against the diamond panes of the cottage casements, to see how the "cove" fared. To them the episode was a welcome break in the monotony of life, and doubtless they regretted its premature ending. Half an hour after entering the cottage Mayrose left it, thrusting a sovereign into his host's hands; and, having lifted Zellie into her saddle, he sprang easily into his own, looking none the worse for what had befallen him. They were ten miles from home, and the road, with its walling of tall hedges and pathside bordering of velvet grass, lay smooth and straight before them, with no threats of further sensation for that day. For all which, Mayrose never forgot that ride home—Zellie's watchfulness following him at every step, her plaintive entreaties to him not to go fast, and the sudden blush that suffused her face when, reining in his horse in a by-lane, he held out his hand to her with brotherly gratitude, and thanked her for her solicitude. This was the first time she had ever blushed with him.

They rode on almost in silence after that, for though Mayrose endeavoured to chat, there was a something between them which made conversation flag. Zellie's nervousness seemed rather to grow than to abate, as the apparent causes of it diminished; and when they reached Elmwood she had become quite silent. Here an eventful incident occurred. Lord Hornette was in the house, for he had not been able fully to shake off his cramp till the hounds were past

catching, and so had ridden back and spent his morning trying to amuse the three countesses, who—be it said in nowise to his disparagement—found his dry-cut remarks not quite a substitute for Mayrose's genial banter. Zellie walked hurriedly into the room where they were assembled, and, as if weakened by her emotion, sank down on the sofa beside her mother, and mentioned in a low tone that Mayrose had had an accident. Lady Rosemary had remarked at once that something was amiss, and she was beginning anxiously to interrogate her daughter. But Zellie left her companion to give the details of the affair himself; and Mayrose did so lightly, combating the too warm zeal of Lady Coralmere and Lady Beaujolais, who clasped hands, advising embrocations, plaister, bed, and everything else that dismayed sympathy could suggest.

"I assure you it was a mere stumble," protested Mayrose for the fourth and fifth times, and with the despair of a man who feels he is becoming ridiculous from over-attention.

"But you had better see the doctor, Freddy. These falls are sometimes dangerous if not attended to," said Lady Rosemary, moving towards the bell.

"Oh, no, it's nothing, Lady Rosemary," cried Lord Hornette, who was examining the grazed arm; "the skin's not off. I've had a dozen tumbles of the sort myself, and they do one good—teach one to be careful."

He did not speak unfeelingly—only in the tone of a man who does not exaggerate trifles. But as the words left his lips Zellie quivered from head to foot, rose from her seat, and fled from the room.

Hornette threw a keen glance at Mayrose.

CHAPTER XI.

A Noble Suitor.

LORD HORNETTE had not invented gunpowder or even tooth-powder, but for all purposes of self-protection he was shrewd. The greatness of his name, the interests of his fortune, and his own private comfort, were so many treasures which his sole occupation here below was to defend, and when anyone stretched out a hand to them he showed his teeth. He also showed his teeth when he had set his mind on anything and could not attain it with reasonable ease—though, be it noted, he asked nothing of Nature in the way of a miracle; he only wanted that whatever his birth, property, and particular whims entitled him to, that he should have, and indisputably. Before Mayrose had come to Elmwood it had been pretty generally noticed that Lord Hornette was growing sedulous in his attentions to Zellie Carol; and if there had been no conversations on the subject—save of course in the servants' hall—it was that Lord Hornette was too great a personage to be hurried in the pace he chose to go. He was the heir of the Drones. He would rule over an estate comprising substantial tracts of land in half-a-dozen counties, and for the present he kept his cool eye on these estates as if

they already belonged to him. Nobody would have cared to ruffle Lord Hornette; and this he knew so well that, whenever an obstacle of any sort rose in his way, he wasted no time in endeavouring to make it bend, but walked resolutely up and snapped it. This is what he essayed to do in the present case.

Zellie's abrupt flight from the room had been too marked to escape attention. Lady Coralmere and Lady Beaujolais had observed it, and with the rapid intuition peculiar to all ladies in these affairs, had taken in the situation as if a flash of lightning had suddenly come upon them. A minute of most awkward silence followed, for the blood mounted to Mayrose's face as if he were guilty of something. Lady Rosemary cast him a glance not less quick and keen than Hornette's, though it was not like the Earl's, a glance of jealousy and mistrust, but rather one of anxious amazement. She seemed to wonder what it could all mean. Mayrose took the pretext of leaving the room to change his things, and thus put an end to the scene. Lady Beaujolais and Lady Coralmere, with ready tact, thought they should like a walk in the garden, and Lord Hornette, with equal composure, but with a private twitching of the upper lip which his brother Dolly would have detected to mean mischief, fetched his hat to accompany them. This allowed Lady Rosemary to go without delay to her daughter's room.

Country houses are strangely quiet at that period of the afternoon when all visitors are out of doors,

and when the housemaids' work is over in the rooms. The passages are deserted; the sun falls with a mellow light into stray nooks where there is no one to enjoy it; the fires in the bedchambers are burning lazily and unstirred, like fires that will not be wanted for another few hours; and every sound of footfall or voice has an echo unheard in mornings. Before she reached Zellie's door Lady Rosemary caught murmurs which her motherly ear knew to be stifled sobbing, and stealing gently into the room, she saw Zellie standing with one foot on the fender, her arm on the mantelshelf, and her forehead resting on her arm. She must have taken off her hat brusquely, for her hair was unfastened, and fell over her shoulders, and she was holding in her left hand a handkerchief wet with tears. Her little frame shook with the violence of her crying, and when Lady Rosemary, after softly locking the door, approached her, and drew her without a word to her breast, Zellie nestled against her mother and sobbed long and silently.

It was a full hour before Lady Rosemary came downstairs wearing a pale look; and in the room where she had left her work she found Lord Hornette, who had been opportunely relieved of his attendance on the ladies by the return of Lord Rosemary from a magistrates' meeting. He was standing on the hearth-rug pulling at his sandy moustache with his slight fingers, and in his suit of grey tweed and dapper boots looked the image of a well-bred little man with whom things have gone crossly.

"I am afraid Zellie has been a little overcome by Lord Mayrose's accident," said the Countess, apologetically; "but she will be better in the evening."

"I hope it has been nothing serious?" answered Lord Hornette, with concern.

"No," replied Lady Rosemary, taking up her work and sitting down; "you know Zellie has always been impressionable, and the danger of our friend was enough to shake her nerves. They were brought up a great deal together as children."

Here there was a pause.

"I was rather desirous of speaking to you on that subject, Lady Rosemary," said the Earl, in a tone that hesitated a little at starting, but soon became firm. He was still standing on the rug, and drew down his wristbands as if to emphasise his discourse. "The matter is one of such moment to me that I would beg leave to allude to it at once."

"Pray speak, Lord Hornette," answered the Countess, bending her head. She pretended to work, but her heart fluttered, and possibly she much wished at that moment that some one would come in and interrupt the interview. No one did come. The destinies of life are constantly hingeing on some one who might come and doesn't.

"I desired to ask your permission and Lord Rosemary's to the taking of a step on which depends all my happiness; in fact, to pay my addresses to Lady Azalea," coughed Lord Hornette, with measured politeness. "I should have done this in any case, dear

Lady Rosemary, before leaving Elmwood, but I think it may be franker to speak at once, in order that there may be no concealment on my part as to my sentiments—may I say very respectful and devoted sentiments?—towards your daughter.”

“Have you spoken to Azalea?” asked Lady Rosemary, rather by way of answering than because the question was expedient, for she felt in considerable distress as to a reply.

“No; I should not have ventured to do that, before assuring myself that my suit would not be disagreeable to you.”

“It could not be disagreeable to me, Lord Hornette.” And yet if there be anything in the inflexion of words, this reply ran wholly counter to its meaning.

“Nor to Lord Rosemary?”

“Nor to Lord Rosemary, I am certain. We must both feel flattered by your attachment to our daughter.”

“Then may I inquire—and pray forgive the question—whether there is any engagement of long standing between Lady Azalea and Lord Mayrose? or whether the affection between them is of any other but a purely friendly kind?”

The Earl had uttered this question in a deliberate tone, but with a deference which softened the asperity it had in his mind; and Lady Rosemary, whose virtue of virtues was truthfulness, laid down her work, and albeit her distress was growing more and more, looked up at him candidly.

"I believe that Zellie's affection for Lord Mayrose is nothing but that of a sister for a brother, and there is no engagement between them. They were children when they parted, and they can have had no time to form any attachment of a lasting character during the past few days. Nevertheless, Lord Hornette, I would scruple to answer for Zellie's sentiments further than to the extent I have mentioned. I only express a belief, and I may tell you that Zellie has confessed nothing to me. Supposing you wait a little, and form your own estimate of Zellie's feelings? She is very young, and you are young too."

"I am of age to know all Lady Azalea's worth," answered the Earl with ready composure; "but may I assume that I have your consent, Lady Rosemary, to pay my addresses?"

"If my consent is all that may be required, you have it, but I could put no restraint on Zellie, nor would her father venture to do so, much as it might gladden him to have you for a son-in-law."

"I should be shocked to hear of constraint, dear Lady Rosemary. But if I have your authority, the question now lies simply between Mayrose and me; and with your permission I will speak to Mayrose." Saying which he approached, deferentially took the Countess's hand and raised it to his lips.

The interview had not lasted ten minutes, and had been conducted with such concise straightforwardness by the Earl that Lady Rosemary had given her answers almost under compulsion, and was truly

dismayed on Lord Hornette's announcing that he was going to look for Mayrose at once. She had a yearning desire to see Mayrose herself, and interrogate him about all that had happened—above all to ascertain with her eyes rather than by actual questions if he reciprocated the love which had been betrayed, though not avowed, by Zellie. If he did not, then she thought that certainly Lord Hornette's offer was a godsend which might nip a one-sided attachment before it had taken lasting root; but if Mayrose had come to her and confessed that he loved Zellie, she would have given him her daughter with a gladness all the greater as this union was one which she had never dared dream of—so recent was Mayrose's return, and so filial the relationship which he held in her eyes. She had it on her lips to beg Lord Hornette would defer all talk with Mayrose until she had seen the latter herself—an unreasonable request, but one suggested by the utter suddenness of these events, and her consequent bewilderment. The Earl, however, in love as in all other matters, acted promptly, and he left her no time. He walked out of the room with the air of a man who could not dine comfortably unless this affair were set at rest.

CHAPTER XII.

Lord Hornette's Tactics.

LORD HORNETTE went up to the apartments which Mayrose occupied in a remote and quiet wing of the house. They were large and cheerful rooms, which the pet of the family had always tenanted as a boy, and they had been fitted up for his return with a loving care by Lady Rosemary and her daughters. In the sitting-room Mayrose had found numerous knick-knacks which had amused him in former days; and some pen-and-ink sketches of himself, done by Zellie, who still retained a talent for good-natured caricatures, hung, signed and framed, on the walls. The principal room, where he had read during holidays for many a school and college examination, was lighted by two spacious windows commanding a grand view of the park, with its dark masses of foliage, branching rookeries, and ornamental lakes with sloping banks, down which the deer came to slake their thirst; and in clear weather distant Hiveborough could be seen glinting like an opal city under the bright sky. The school friendship between Hornette and Mayrose dispensed the former from ceremony, so he simply knocked at the door and walked in. Mayrose had

taken off his hunting things and bathed his arm, and was standing with his back to the fire. He was dressed for dinner, with the exception of his coat, which lay over a chair, and instead of it he wore a Peruvian dressing-gown, striped, in wide bands, blue and yellow, like an awning. His face was serious, and he had been wrapped in deep contemplation when Hornette aroused him.

"I have come for a moment's private talk, old fellow, if I am not intruding," said the Earl, who could not help throwing a glance at that wondrous dressing-gown.

"By no means. Sit down and have a smoke."

"Thanks; these look capital weeds. Branded for you, I suppose?"

"It would be the correct thing to pretend they were; but the truth is, when I visited the factory at Havanna all the workmen were out for a day's sport upsetting the Government. I got these in the States."

"A Yankee's cigar is the finest thing in him," remarked the heir of the Bumblebeighs, ensconcing himself in a chair, and striking a match; after which preface he puffed a whiff or two, then began roundly, "I am afraid what I am going to say may not be very welcome to you; but it's no use beating about bushes when one's in earnest. Then you and I are old friends, and I want us to remain so." At which juncture, had the two been foreigners, they would have shaken hands; but, being English, each nodded.

"It comes to this; before you arrived I had been paying court to Lady Azalea Carol, and I had reason to think that my attentions were growing acceptable. Since you came I have noticed that your position towards Lady Azalea seemed to exceed that of mere friendliness, and an event which occurred to-day has lent colour to the impression. So my purpose was to inquire of you whether you intended asking Lady Azalea to be your wife. I hope you won't think it unfair if I beg a candid answer."

"This is rather sudden," replied Mayrose, who reddened: but he secretly despised himself for the evasion. There was a touch of haughtiness in his tone; and, although he had not yet had time to see clear into his own mind, he was on the point of giving a short "Yes" to the Earl's question. Why did he not do so, and avert the misunderstandings that followed?

"It is sudden," rejoined Lord Hornette, coolly; "but I stand on this ground: if I have you for a rival, I must withdraw. I could make Lady Azalea a duchess, but she is not a girl to weigh this against an affection of longer standing, or—I frankly say so—against other advantages you have over me. In fact, I should have no chance against you." (Lord Hornette did not quite believe this, but he knew the worth of occasional bluffness.) "Now, I ought to add," continued the Earl, as if parenthetically, "that I have requested permission to pay my addresses to Lady Rosemary's daughter, and she has assured me that both the

Earl and herself would gladly accept me for a son-in-law."

Here it should have been Lord Hornette's turn to scruple at a statement which was accurate in form, but not in substance. What he intended to convey was, that Lord and Lady Rosemary had expressed a preference for him over Mayrose; and this, as we know, was not the case. But men in love are not always nice in their strategy, and Lord Hornette was decidedly in love.

"You have spoken to Lady Rosemary?" exclaimed Mayrose, stopping his cigar half-way to his lips, and pronouncing with sudden hoarseness, "May I ask when?"

"Not half-an-hour ago."

"And she said that she desired your marriage with Lady Azalea?"

"That was her intimation, but she added that she would place no constraint on her daughter. I had her goodwill—nothing else."

Mayrose turned pale, but after this unexpected statement his answer was plainly dictated to him. He had little experience of love, for he had not commenced life by distributing his heart in fragments amongst all the pretty faces he met; and it was only since these last few hours he had begun to guess that if to think of one woman at all hours, to the dimming of every thought, were love, then his feelings towards Zellie might be love. But what could he offer Zellie in comparison with the princely title and huge domains

which would be Lord Hornette's? It might well be that Lady Rosemary had projected for her elder daughter an alliance with the heir to the greatest fortune in the county; and what return should he be making for the many indulgent kindnesses shown him if he were to obstruct this match? Surely this would be more than a breach of the tacit trust reposed in his discretion. He had been affectionately received at Elmwood, and placed on his old footing; but, as a matter of fact, his position towards the family was wholly changed from what it had formerly been, for Zellie and Violet had become rich heiresses, whilst he was a needy peer, who had never done aught to signalise his name, and whose attentions towards his host's daughters might well deserve to be taxed with presumption, and even with interestedness. All this passed through his mind with the vividness of something painful and new in the few seconds allowed him to frame his reply; and, when he gave this reply, it was in a wincing tone. He felt like a man who has been on the brink of unwittingly doing a dishonourable action. It was not as though he were persuaded that Zellie loved him. Had he been sure of this, he might have persevered, in despite of all comments; but, in his perplexity, it seemed to him that he must have laboured under a hallucination. He could only remember the dialogue he had overheard between Zellie and Hornette in the park, Lady Rosemary's invariable regard for the Earl, the latter's secure influence at Elmwood—all of which things seemed to argue a

match long decided upon. Thus honour and duty prompted Mayrose to renounce, without reserve, his own unspoken pretensions; and he answered—

“My affection for”—his throat was thick, and he was obliged to cough—“my affection for Azalea Carol is very deep, Hornette, but it does not exceed brotherly friendship; and—I have no thought of asking her to be my wife.”

“And may I rely that this determination is lasting? I mean, circumstances would not make you alter your mind?”

“No,” replied Mayrose with an effort, “this is too serious a matter to be trifled with: it would be disingenuous if I gave you but a half assurance.”

“Well, then, I have been fortunately mistaken,” exclaimed the Earl, whose elation was visible in this, that he nearly put the lighted end of his cigar into his mouth. “But now, old man, may I appeal to you to do me a kindness? It will be a kindness to my future wife as well as to me. If you think that Azalea Carol can be happy under my care, you will not wish her to be open to any of the misconstruction which might arise from undue familiarity, however innocent, with you. I say this because of Society, you know, which is a vixenish thing that bites for the fun of it. Up to this time, thank God, our family have kept out of fang-reach; we are proud that there has not been the breath of a scandal against any woman bearing our name.”

"There shall be none so far as I am concerned," was Mayrose's quiet promise. "I was going back to town in a few days, but if it can add to your peace of mind I will start to-morrow. Perhaps it will be better if I go, in any case."

"No, no, it would be childish to require that," answered Hornette, with a semblance of magnanimity and good fellowship. "Act with Lady Azalea as you would with any other girl affianced to one of your friends; all I want is, to prevent little tattlers like that Lady Coralmere from ever setting you and me against each other. For the rest, I only hope your regard for Lady Azalea and me will continue throughout our lives, and if the marriage comes off, you will do me sincere pleasure by being my best man."

Lord Hornette, with his slim legs crossed, spoke in a fatuitous tone of confidence as if the marriage were certain; and he deemed it so. There were not half-a-dozen unengaged women between Lerwick in the Shetlands and the Scilly Isles who would have refused to become mistresses of Hivesworth, and it was inadmissible that the Earl's unlucky star should have brought him to court just one of the six who might possibly decline. He fidgetted in his chair with the restlessness of a cleverly-won triumph, and only the decent civility we owe to a man who has relieved us of a big load prevented him from leaving the room before he had finished his cigar. He employed the embarrassing interval in reverting to Mayrose's accident, and was talkatively surprised the

latter had not embrocated his arm with arnica, as it was always prudent so to do in such cases. He would send him a phial of the tincture which he had in his travelling medicine-chest; and this said, his cigar was so far consumed—he began to think the Americans smoked too much at one go—that he could depart. He hastened first to give his valet the arnica, for he was punctual in his promises, and then hurried downstairs to apprise Lady Rosemary that he had no rival in the field, and to ask the more formal sanction of Lord Rosemary to his love-making, in order that, according to his programme, things should be in a smooth way before dinner. Small Lord Hornette was a man who struck, not once, when the iron was hot, but twenty and fifty times.

He left Mayrose very melancholy. The man who sees the sun obscured by a cloud just after it has dawned feels what Mayrose felt. He would not have believed that so many emotions could have ploughed his heart within a few hours and resulted in an utter disenchantment of everything. He had never known unhappiness before, and he would have been at a loss to account for his unhappiness now, for before Hornette had come in, he had no settled project of asking Zellie to be his wife. He had not been able even thoroughly to convince himself that his sentiments towards her were love, and therefore they visibly stood towards each other as before—as brother and sister. But his inner heart rejected this sophistry.

He went and sat down at his writing-table, resting his elbow on it and gazing into the park, through which Violet, Lord Beaujolais, and Dolly Drone presently ambled abreast, returning from the best run of the season. They seemed not to have heard of his accident, for he could see they were laughing, and Violet was stroking the mane of her mare as if to praise her for gallant exploits. Bino, who came in with the arnica, found his master tracing listless circles on his blotting-book and lost in a frowning reverie.

"Lord Hornette, he sent me with this, milord, and he call dat medicine; but I no believe in medicine smell as strong as this. If I drink this I be dead drunk. Yes, sir."

"Put it in the dressing-room, Bino."

Bino, going to comply, held the phial at arm's length, and turned round—

"You hurt by dat fall, sir? If I were you I no give myself de trouble to break my neck jumping after a fox. If I want a fox I put some of dis stuff on a piece of meat and poison him. Dat's what I do."

"I'm all right, Bino. What time is it?"

"Just upon first dinner-gong. You take a glass of bitters now, milord; he do you good. There goes dat gong."

The gong's copper voice was bellowing in the hall, and so Mayrose had an hour before he need face Lady Rosemary and Zellie again. He shirked

this meeting, for it was cruel pain to him to think that Lady Rosemary might all this while be suspecting him of having acted unhandsomely. On the other hand, he was just in such a temper that if Lady Rosemary had greeted him with her accustomed gentleness he would have felt angry towards her in his mortification that she should have valued him less than a man like Lord Hornette. If he could have known that the Countess had been fretting to see him ever since she had spoken with Zellie, and that one of the sharpest pangs she had ever experienced had been on hearing from Lord Hornette's exulting lips that Mayrose had no thoughts of wooing her daughter! But where would be the errors and heart-burnings of life if we were not for ever playing at cross purposes? The minutes sped all too fast, but Mayrose waited for the stroke of the dinner hour before he descended to the drawing-room, where the other guests were already mustered every one. It was to be another great dinner of county notables, and the number of them was like a swarm exceeding black, beflooned, and hungry. Amid this throng Mayrose looked and quickly caught sight of Zellie. Her dress was never the same at two of these dinners, and this evening she was in white silk ornamented with scarlet geraniums. These dazzling flowers shone on her glistening skirts, in her bosom, in the golden coils of her hair, and they helped to set off the pallor of her complexion—a pallor that was being generally attributed to a slight headache.

Mayrose's entry created a sort of sensation. Though Lady Beaujolais and Lady Coralmere for discreet reasons remained mute as to the day's events, Violet, who had now heard of the accident, but knew nothing of all that had occurred since the ride home, was not so reticent, and the whole story of the leap, the fall, and the bruised arm had to be gone through again amidst a chorus of sympathy. It is singular how the mishaps of some men evoke universal condolence, while the graver calamities of others are treated as matters for jesting. Unhappy Mr. Buttercombe, who was present that evening, had been pitched on his head, on his knees, on his back, till his frame had become seamed like a melon; but these catastrophes had passed into standing jokes relished everywhere in the county, even by Mr. Buttercombe himself. Mayrose was naturally averse to being wailed over as a fragile piece of glass, but happily he was asked to take in Lady Coralmere to dinner, and the skilful prattle of this lady, who was dying to know whether he reciprocated Zellie Carol's passion, and to prove him kept him continually talking—this served to set his nerves in order. The wine also revived him; and studying to keep his eyes from glancing where Zellie sat, he reached the middle and end of dinner in chit-chat, absorbing enough, about some new opera, and the variations in ladies' fashions. After dinner Violet sang the "Mandolinata" serenade, and a gentleman who was known in Hiveshire for his famous imitations of popular actors got hold of a broken hat

and gave screaming versions of Mr. Buckstone and Mr. Toole; so this part of the evening went off well also. But Mayrose dreaded that half-hour round the fire, when all the guests would be gone, and when but the few visitors staying in the house would be closing the day with a little intimate talk. He knew not what countenance he should keep when he found himself close to Zellie, and when he should be obliged to shake hands with her and say good-night. It must have been an intuitive sense which warned him of the crowning misery that was reserved for him in that half-hour; for as soon as Lord Rosemary had returned from escorting the last county lady to the door, he laid his hand on Mayrose's shoulder, and said brightly—

“So Freddy, you are irresistible everywhere, and you have been winning the heart of Miss Pennywon.”

Mayrose felt himself redden to the roots of his hair.

“Miss Pennywon, the heiress?” put in Lord Hornette, with perhaps not unintentional stress.

“Yes, a fine heiress, and all England must hear of the conquest if Sir Ham repeats it everywhere, as he did to-day at our magistrates' meeting,” proceeded Lord Rosemary, with the graceful jocularitv of a man who thinks he is doing no harm. “It seems Freddy saw her at Springfield the other day, and gave her a bouquet of camelias.”

Mayrose was sick at heart. He dared not glance at Zellie, but he looked towards Lady Rosemary, and their eyes met. He would have died on the spot to escape that look.

CHAPTER XIII.

A General Election.

EVERYBODY is aware that Parliament was suddenly dissolved that year within a few days appointed for the opening of the Session; and politicians found themselves plunged into electoral contests like men beneath whom a bank gives way, and who take headers with their clothes on. Two stirring manifestoes from Mr. Paramount and Mr. Paradyse pealed like bugles over the land. The telegraphic wires, darting their brisk feelers over the Continent, pulled home by the ears, as it were, scores of startled M.P.'s who had been wintering placidly under southern skies; the dead-walls and hoardings of Great Britain became blue, red, yellow, and rainbow-like with addresses; and from all points of the compass—from the hullabaloo wilds of Ireland to the Tory corn lands of English shires—there was a rush of candidates as of many herds of Bashan bulls let loose, and a thunderous bellowing of "Vote for us!" "Plump for us!" Among the foremost of those who thus bellowed were Lord Hornette and Dolly Drone, who although as secure in their seats as two spikes on posts, bestirred themselves, and signed gallant ap-

peals to their constituents. Of course this surprise broke up the party at Elmwood, for the brothers started off to show themselves to their electors; Lord Rosemary went away to use his influence for a nominee on one of his estates in the north, and Mayrose returned to Springfield.

He had no wish to go there. The news of the dissolution arrived within a few hours of the events recorded in the last chapter, and if he could have had his way he would have remained at Elmwood alone with Lady Rosemary and her daughters, and have set at rest the misunderstanding which had so unaccountably grown up between him, Zellie, and the Countess. But fidelity to his engagement with Lord Hornette prevented him from doing this. So he left Elmwood, pained to the heart that Lady Rosemary should not ask him to stop, and feeling that he was somehow lowered in her estimation without having done anything to deserve this.

Passing through Hiveborough, he saw some workmen busy with pots and brushes, painting in letters a foot long, "VOTE FOR PENNYWON," and this sight moved the wrath within him. He was determined to shake off this accursed City man, who was the cause of the last cruel pang he had suffered in the drawing-room at Elmwood, when the camelia incident had been mentioned. Sir Ham was stalking him about without shame or decency, and had become loathsome to his very thoughts. He noticed that there were no addresses from the Knight yet out, but only these

painted screams for votes, and he concluded that Sir Ham was waiting until he had seen him before launching a proclamation of his views, the which would doubtless tally syllable for syllable with whatever Mayrose chose to dictate. In this he was not wrong, but Sir Ham thinking him at Elmwood, had written thither craving an interview; and so Mayrose received the Knight's visit a day later than he had expected. He employed the interval in preparing a set reply, in which, whilst showing all the regard due to Sir Ham's recent domestic affliction, he would inform him that he saw no reason for displacing Mr. Abel Dexter. The better to steel himself for this declaration, he tried to ascertain all he could about the sitting member, applying for this purpose to one Grindle, a hosier, churchwarden, town councillor, and an active character in the borough.

Mr. Abel Dexter, as sketched by Mr. Grindle, was a smart young man from "Oxford College." He had come to contest Hiveborough soon after taking his degree, and having no money or connections, so far as men were aware, it was presumed that he had simply aimed at attracting public notice, without cherishing a hope of winning the seat. But it chanced that a day or two before the contest his rival was stricken with paralysis, and Mr. Dexter had by that time so ingratiated himself with everybody, even with his opponents, that these latter consented to let him "walk over"—doing this with the more courtesy as they were unable to light upon another candidate at

so short a notice. This is how Mr. Dexter had been returned for Hiveborough. Mayrose was abroad when it all happened, but if he desired a sample of Mr. Dexter's opinions, Mr. Grindle was in a position to show him that honourable gentleman's first address. The interview had for its scene Mr. Grindle's shop parlour, and the hosier unlocked a cupboard, on the shelves of which lay neatly docketed the addresses of every candidate who had canvassed Hiveborough since Mr. Grindle's head had risen above his father's counter. He took a humorous interest in politics, did Mr. Grindle, and had christened this cupboard his "pawnbroker's shop," because it was so full of unredeemed pledges.

"Now, my lod," said he, wetting his thumb to turn over an old copy of the "Hiveborough Bee," "now this is what I call a safe address; there's no bumps in it." There were no bumps. Mr. Dexter's views were of the elastic sort, which stretch any length and any way. They would never compromise their owner, who under cover of them might advance or recede, manœuvre from Mr. Speaker's right to his left, and yet aver he was always consistent with his original programme. It requires a talent eminently English to indite these neutral creeds, in which every affirmative stands enshrouded in a mist of saving clauses thick and bewildering as opium smoke. For Mayrose's purpose the address did well, for there was not an opinion in the political catalogue which Mr. Dexter could be said either to endorse or reject, and there-

fore if Sir Ham spoke of his principles it would be easy to reply that Mr. Dexter had principles, too, and universal ones.

"Ain't it clever, my lod!" chuckled Mr. Grindle, unstringing several cardboard boxes, for Mayrose had ostensibly come to buy pocket-handkerchiefs. "These are half a guinea apiece, the finest cambric — one would wish to have a cold in the head to use such handkerchiefs. As for Mr. Dexter, he's a deep young gentleman, my lod. We were six of us trying to find out his Church views, but he went three times to church in one Sunday—morning to the parish, to the Baptist's in the afternoon, and wound up the day with the Jumpers."

"You can send me a dozen of these, Mr. Grindle. At all events Mr. Dexter seems to be a keen Protestant."

"Well, my lod, we haven't a Catholic church here," said Mr. Grindle.

"Which means that Mr. Dexter would have gone to mass if he could?"

"My lod, begging your pardon, if the devil were to open a chapel of ease in the borough I think we should find Mr. Dexter seated in a front pew. He's a gentleman who'd take off his hat to a dog if he happened to tread on his tail. These here are silk handkerchiefs, my lod, with coloured borders, light blue, scarlet, and orange. Seven guineas and a half the dozen, and just the things for the hunting-field.

Nothing's so neat to my mind as a showy handkerchief in the breast-pocket of a red coat."

"I prefer plain silk, Mr. Grindle. But now I suppose you are going to return Mr. Dexter again?"

"Well, my lod, there's Sir Ham Pennywon coming forrard;" and at this gilded name Mr. Grindle's eyes circled into admiring focuses. This hosier was a busy tradesman with a pink face and a store of facetiousness, who had made of his mind three compartments, labelled "Commerce," "Church," "Politics," and from each of the compartments he could draw as occasion demanded shrewd maxims for the guidance of himself and neighbours — but especially of the neighbours. Dropping an orange-hemmed handkerchief, he now said, with his head jerked on one side like a cautious bird's, "Mr. Dexter hasn't issued no address yet, for he was in Paris and has been telegraphed for; but Sir Ham is a warm man who spends much money in Hiveborough, and we made sure he would have your lordship's support."

"I have no vote, Mr. Grindle."

"That's true; but many of us would be guided by your choice, my lod. I would for one. As there ain't any bribery to be expected, and as the Ballot 'll keep Sir Ham from knowing who voted for him and who didn't, we can afford to go by our consciences — which will be something new."

"Since you put it in that light, I may tell you that if I had a vote I should give it to Mr. Dexter."

"Whew!" deferentially ejaculated Mr. Grindle, with

a stare of surprise, "Well, my lod, when I get repeating that in the town it'll make a great difference to Sir Ham's chances, though of course he'll get as many *promises* as he chooses to ask for. We never looked upon Mr. Dexter as a permanency; but since you like him——"

"I see no reason for unseating him, that's all," interrupted Mayrose.

"It amounts to the same in the end, my lod," remarked Mr. Grindle, sapiently, and then added with a gush, "But what a pity it is your lodship can't come forrard! Why don't they let peers choose between the two Houses—the young ones to sit in the Lower House, and the old ones in the Upper?"

Why, indeed? As Mayrose left Mr. Grindle's shop, glorious with his trophies of striped socks, scarves, and huckaback towels, he deplored with a sharp regret that he could take no part in the coming contest. It was market-day in Hiveborough; the pavements in the main thoroughfare were fenced round with stakes and chains to prevent the beeves and calves from getting on the flags and butting the townsfolk into the shop windows; and the farmers and drovers who slouched about haggling or hung round the steps of the Springfield Arms were all talking more or less about the elections. When Mayrose passed they nudged each other, stood aside, and respectfully lifted their hats; and near the inn door he had a sort of ovation, for three bulky farmers were coming out, sleek in their velveteens, and with lips

merry from brandy-and-water, and one of them apostrophised him, shouting:—"We want a true blue candidate in Hiveborough, my lord—one who'll stop the plunderin and blunderin." And as Mayrose nodded with a smile, the farmers gave him a cheer which was taken up, amid great commotion from the cattle, and followed him for a hundred yards. His popularity in Hiveborough—the heritage he derived from centuries of generosity, lordliness, and goodness on the part of his fathers—was a thing which nothing could shake, and if he had been a candidate in this town he would have been elected with acclamation. This he knew, and it was miserable to him that it could not be, for, after all, what was his peerage worth? The privilege of a peer consists in voting on certain occasions solemnly against his convictions. If he declines doing this, he is warned by the piercing shrieks of Liberal newspapers or by mob-stones thrown through his window that he is putting his order in peril. Mayrose saw nothing worth conserving in the privilege to do as journalists command, and a suppression or radical reform of the House of Lords had no terrors to his mind. No one could strip him of the name he bore or of the memories that made that name noble; but if the House of Lords were transformed into a Senate of Members elected on the American plan by county boards, there might be more hope for Conservative—that is, anti-Democratic—Government than under the present system. The ex-peers of wealth and intellect would get returned

to the House of Commons, or, if elected to the Senate, they would belong to an assembly whose powers would be no sham. England might be ruled again, then, with a steel hand; throw off that incubus of commercial pusillanimity which weighs on the body-politic like so much weakening fat, and show a bold front both to enemies abroad and to crack-brained demolishers at home. If this change were ever mooted, Mayrose secretly pledged himself to support it with all his might, even though he seemed thereby to act against his party; for Conservatism is not the sustaining of institutions which have become virtually obsolete, but the vigorous withstanding of government by demagogues—that is, government by unscrupulous sophists truckling to the ignorance, vanity, and imbecility of the masses.

The natural reaction consequent upon Mayrose's rather excited musings left him melancholy when he returned to Springfield. He pondered again about Zellie and Elmwood, and after dinner, being alone in his study, wrote the following letter, which brought him relief:—

My dear Lady Rosemary,—I do not care to conceal any of my thoughts from you, and I am depressed from fearing that something has occurred to mar the confidence you had in me. I explained, after Lord Rosemary's joke about Miss Pennywon, under what circumstances I had met irrepressible Sir Ham and his family; but I felt that I stammered and stumbled in speaking, for after the conversation I had held with yourself about Miss Pennywon I was conscious of standing in an absurd light. There are moments when circumstances conspire to make a man look inevitably foolish. I wish you could understand my real impressions about these Pennywons. I have been doing my best to-day to prevent Sir Ham's election in Hiveborough, and I would give a year's income to hear of Miss Mary's being safely married to someone who would remove her hundreds of miles from my conservatories and my peace of mind. I take this occasion of saying that Lord Hornette came to me the day

before I left Elmwood and made me acquainted with the sanction he had obtained from you for paying his addresses to Zellie. At the same time—impelled, I suppose, by some suspiciousness peculiar to lovers—he asked me whether I myself stood in the way of his courtship! Need I declare that I was pained at the mere idea that I could be suspected of frustrating any project on which you had set your heart?—and now I add my best, most confident hopes that Zellie may be rendered happy by this match.

Please write, dear Lady Rosemary, for your letters are balm to me, and believe me,

Most faithfully yours,
MAYROSE.

This letter was still lying on Mayrose's table on the next morning, for he intended sending it to Elmwood by a groom with some more of his camelias and some hothouse fruit. But at breakfast he read the papers, and they brought him a piece of news which by-and-by obliged him to throw his letter into the fire, and write another very different in one respect—that which treated of Sir Ham's candidateship. The London papers, in giving the list of candidates, mentioned that the struggle would lie between Mr. Dexter and Sir Ham Pennywon; but the "Hiveborough Bee," in its leading column, printed this announcement in large type:—

"At the moment of going to press we learn from authentic sources that Mr. Dexter retires from the contest in our borough, and that Mr. Howle, a candidate of the Down-trodden Proletary Association, is coming from London to oppose Sir Ham Pennywon. Mr. Howle's address will be issued to-day, and it will embody the views of the Republican Faction."

While Mayrose was brooding in vexation over this unexpected intelligence the front-door bell was rung, and a footman entered to announce Mr. Grindle, who

had been driven over from Hiveborough in a dog-cart by the ostler of the Springfield Arms. He was flushed like a popular ambassador on a special mission, and bowed himself into the peer's presence with profuse apologies, holding his hat behind him as if he were ashamed of it, though it was a new one.

"My lod, I took the liberty of coming over about the election."

"Sit down, Mr. Grindle; I am sorry to see Mr. Dexter retires."

"Yes, my lod, and that alters the complexion of everybody. Knowing your lodship never wants to cloak his mind, I just spoke last night at our club about your sayings as to Sir Ham, and a great many of us agreed not to vote for him."

"You did quite right to repeat my words," answered Mayrose. "I am for open voting and, above all, for plain-speaking in politics."

"But now, my lod," submitted Mr. Grindle, "I thought I'd just make free to question you about Mr. Howle. He's not the kind of man as would suit anybody who has saved a few pounds and wants to keep them. If you had a vote, my lod, would you give it to this Mr. Howle?"

Mayrose hesitated an instant. He was on the point of saying in his irritation that he should vote for nobody; but honesty checked him from giving way to this bit of spite. Mr. Howle of the Proletary Association was one of those persons whom politicians cannot afford to ignore, but must combat. So May-

rose reluctantly advised Mr. Grindle and his friends to vote for Pennywon. But to himself he added, with a gesture of impatience—

“There seems to be a fatality in it. That man will come now and swear he owes his election to me.”

CHAPTER XIV.

Mr. Abel Dexter.

NOTHING was more likely than that Sir Ham would do this, and indeed before the day was out the Warden of the Sausage-Makers was certifying to all who chose to listen to him that he had Lord Mayrose at his back—this with a view to scaring off any ulterior candidates who might spring up beside the down-trodden Mr. Howle. But at the moment when Mayrose was uttering the words, Sir Ham himself was unconscious of the good luck that had befallen him, for, busy reading the London papers, he had omitted to look at the "Hiveborough Bee," which was not at ordinary times a highly informed or very seductive publication. On coming down to breakfast and to the family prayers which preceded this repast, Sir Ham had been surprised and not a little frightened at finding no reply to the letter he had forwarded to Mayrose at Elmwood. During prayers, his agitation caused him to skip a few lines of the ritual and to jumble others unintelligibly with one another—as who should say, religious processions in a hurry and jostling each other at a church door; and at breakfast, between mouthfuls of fried sole, he consulted his wife and

daughter flurriedly about the wisdom of driving over to Springfield at any hazard, and if the peer were not there of pushing on to Elmwood. Lady Pennywon, who harboured worshipful ideas of the Lord of Springfield since the episode in the camelia-house, opined that if there was no answer it could only be due to a miscarriage; Mary Pennywon poured out the tea in silence, and opined nothing. Sir Ham however was destined to hear of his rival's retirement in the most unforeseen and startling manner from that rival's own lips. It was after breakfast in the morning-room, whither the Knight and his family habitually adjourned, that the surprise occurred. Even the black clad footman of Penny looked scared when he brought in the salver with a card inscribed:—"Mr. Abel Dexter—Reform Club—Upper Temple."

"Mr. Dexter!" gasped Sir Ham, puncturing his tongue with a toothpick; and amazement flowed in a purple torrent to his face. Both Lady Pennywon and Mary, who were sewing violet favours to deck the Sausage-Maker on the day of battle (violet is a neutral tint) looked up astonished, for Mr. Dexter had of course been described to them as an ill-conditioned, bloodthirsty foe.

"Show him in," stuttered Sir Ham, in a throttling tone; and too much stunned to say another word or to assume the aspect of bellicose dignity which should have well graced him on such an occasion, he trotted behind his footman's heels into the room where Mr. Dexter was awaiting him. It was a cozily warmed vi-

siting-room with peerages and knightages on the table, and Mr. Dexter sat by the fire in new dog-skin gloves and with a gold-headed stick of rhinoceros horn. He was a young man of twenty-seven, neither tall nor short, light nor dark, handsome nor ill-favoured. There was no salient point in him which you could lay hold of. The London Clubs exhibit hundreds of such well-dressed, unruffled, unobtrusive persons as he; and when he spoke there was nothing remarkable in his language or in his voice. He was an unremarkable person all over, and it had needed a quick observer and physiognomist like Mayrose to judge from Mr. Dexter's photograph, shown him in Mr. Touzle's shop, that the ex-member for Hiveborough had energetic features. Ordinarily beholders would have thought his countenance well fitted for a satisfied curate's, an ambitionless barrister's, or a clerk's content to dot and carry one on a high stool for moderate wages. On Sir Ham's appearing, Mr. Dexter advanced and began simply—

“Sir Ham, I deemed it an act of necessary courtesy to call personally on you to say that I retire from the contest in Hiveborough.”

Sir Ham came to anchor on a piece of carpet representing a yellow tulip on a blue ground, and his nostrils blew out as if he was going to snort.

“You are not going to try for the seat?” he muttered, dribbling out his words with an uneasy suspiciousness of something not visible, but likely to explode by-and-by.

Mr. Dexter had reseated himself, on a dumb request of the Knight's. "No. You have county influence, and I have none; you will probably be supported by Lord Mayrose, and I shall have no support, for I was only elected last time by a hazard. A contest would be a useless expense to me, and a needless annoyance to you. That is my position."

"You are very good," grunted Sir Ham, not knowing what he said, but sinking into a chair, and drawing his handkerchief to mop his hot features. He required a minute or two to rally his scattered thoughts, and, the better to do so, ended by spreading out his handkerchief across his knees, as if he particularly wanted Mr. Dexter to admire the pattern. Suddenly he paused in the act of mutely demonstrating that all the patterns were alike, and inquired in a guarded tone, "Then am I to understand that the seat's safely mine?"

"So far as I am concerned you have no opponent. I believe a Mr. Howle is coming forward, but he can be of no danger."

"Ah, there's a Mr. Howle!" ejaculated Sir Ham. "Who's Mr. Howle, sir?" Sir Ham often addressed people as "sir" in heated moments.

"Nothing to speak of; but have you not seen the paper? I think I have a copy with me." And settling his hat on the floor Mr. Dexter drew a "Hiveborough Bee" from his pocket and laid the sensational paragraph of the morning before Sir Ham. To have be-

held Sir Ham clutch this periodical, and bring his jutting eyes to bear on it as if they were going to jump through the paper, would have been a refreshing sight to any man. It took him but slight reading to see that Mr. Howle would be a harmless antagonist; but he perused the paragraph a dozen times for his own satisfaction's sake before he returned Mr. Dexter his paper; then he smoothed his thighs with both hands, and delivered himself anew—

“It seems to me, Mr. Dexter, you're behaving handsome.”

“Say sensibly,” laughed this gentleman, with a deprecating gesture of his left dogskin.

“I call it handsome,” doggedly repeated Sir Ham; “it's handsome, Muster Dexter, for there's no saying but you might have beaten me.”

“I do not think so; but even if I had, I tell you frankly my victory might have embarrassed me. I came forward originally rather for amusement and for exercise in public speaking; but the House of Commons is too expensive for a man with no income. In ten years' time, if I pick up practice enough at the Bar, I may have a try again.”

“Aye, I heerd you were at the Bar, Mr. Dexter.” And Sir Ham took stock of his visitor, beginning with his boots, which were of polished leather, and going up to his hair, which was parted down the middle—hair neither lank nor curly, but clever hair, keeping its place as it had been brushed.

"Yes," said the ex-M.P., "and it's a current impression that a young barrister who gets into Parliament is run after by briefs. But the briefs would not run after me, as I have taken two years to discover."

"If I ever have a suit at law—which I shan't, for I don't like lawyer's business—you shall defend me—I mean, speak for me," exclaimed Sir Ham, with cautious emphasis. "It strikes me you're a sharp young man, though it mayn't be manners to say so."

Mr. Dexter rose, smiling.

"Candidates' moments are always valuable at election time, Sir Ham. I called in order that there might be no doubt as to my unequivocal withdrawal, and I have only to add now that if I can be of any service to you in addressing the electors in your behalf, you will find me ready. I have put up at the Springfield Arms."

"You'll speak to the electors for me! Stop!" cried Sir Ham, whose surprise now took the form of apoplectic excitement. "Dang me, Muster Dexter, if you ain't acting like a gentleman! If you are going to speak for me to the electors, you'll come and stop at my house, not at the inn. Blow it! My servants shall go over and fetch your luggage. Don't say no."

"This is too kind, Sir Ham. It would be a great intrusion in me."

"Intrusion! who says so? It'll do me good. Those electors will know we've become fast friends; and it'll do you good, for we'll take care o' you and make

your stay pleasant. Come along, and see my wife and daughter."

Here it might have struck a physiognomist that Mr. Dexter yielded rather promptly to Sir Ham's proposition. Beyond his first few words of protest he adduced no objection, and it was with a demeanour eminently cool and a step quite ready that he followed Sir Ham into the morning-room, and suffered himself to be presented to the ladies.

"Sir Ham is embarrassing me with his great kindness," he said urbanely to Lady Pennywon.

"Kindness! Why he's just given me his seat in Parliament, and he's going to make speeches for me!" yelled rather than answered honest Sir Ham, and straddling towards the bell he pulled it. "My dears, I shall go into Hiveborough now to see about the printing of them addresses, and call on Lord Mayrose before doing so just to see which address he likes best. Muster Dexter, will you stay with the ladies till I come back? We'll have your luggage over in the afternoon."

"I will stay with pleasure, but I am afraid I shall be terribly in Lady Pennywon's way," replied Mr. Dexter, appealing to the elder lady, but glancing at Mary Pennywon.

"Don't talk about being in the way, Mr. Dexter," said Lady Pennywon, with matronly good-nature. "We'll have the blue room got ready—eh, Mary, dear?"

"Yes, mamma, I'll go and see about it at once," said Mary, not quite in her usual matter-of-fact way.

The truth is Mr. Dexter's arrival had come upon them like a refreshing vernal shower, and they did not know what to make of it, or what to say.

CHAPTER XV.

A Change of Ministry.

SIR HAM PENNYWON was duly returned to serve in Parliament, and the election was a very tame affair, for Mr. Howle only mustered twenty votes. There was no carousing or horse-play; no cats were thrown, no brass-bands or banners patrolled the streets. The electors skulked into a labyrinth of wooden boxes, and dropped their votes through a slit, as if ashamed of them; then slunk out, looking sheepish, like men who would have no defence to offer if anyone taxed them with having voted against their troth. At four o'clock the poll closed, and a dozen flustered policemen came up in batches of four from three different parts of the borough, carrying the ballot-boxes to the Town Hall. There the mayor, having counted the papers and turned them back upwards, with a cluster of citizens around to watch him and see that he put none of them in his pocket, made an addition sum; and a returning officer having verified this sum by counting all the papers over again, as if he profoundly distrusted both the mayor's arithmetic and his capacity for telling the truth, at last announced Sir Ham Pennywon's triumph out of a window, to a by no means surprised mob

that had gathered outside the building. Some young gentlemen from the grammar-school, who had just been let out of class, set up a cheer, and plied their satchels over each other's heads, to get up the semblance of an excitement; but the public commotion went no farther. Sir Ham's mourning dispensed him from attending a festive dinner which his committeemen held at the Springfield Arms; so, having made a speech from the balcony of the house, and promised Mr. Grindle the hosier, Mr. Touzle the photographer, and the rest of the mob, as also the grammar-school boys, that he would defend our ancient Constitution, the Established Church, and the interests of licensed victuallers, he shook hands with numerous persons he had never seen before, sprang into his carriage with Mr. Dexter, and was whirled home to the congratulations of Lady Pennywon and Mary and to dinner. It was an over-cooked dinner from having been kept waiting, but Sir Ham's contentment left him no palate to be critical. He repeated six times! "I shall have to get some black breeches, Mary, to dine with the Speaker;" and when he was left alone over his wine with Mr. Dexter, the vanity of his new-won title of M.P. seemed to fume up into his head with the port, and his gratitude bubbled up along with it, into vows of eternal friendship.

Sir Ham, having stood as a supporter of Mr. Paramount, found himself member of the majority; for, contrary to all expectations, the general election ordered by Mr. Paradyse resulted in the triumph of

his rival. Hereat Mr. Paradyse, more in sorrow than in anger at the wayward country which had deserted him, tendered his resignation. Never was a nation more astonished, and never were writers and politicians more crestfallen than those who had marched the march of glory behind Mr. Paradyse; for whenever this great man's supporters had been beaten in single elections it was the Tobacco interest that had done it all, or the Soda-water interest, or both these interests acting in collusion with the Shaker Brotherhood, who, it is well known, wanted to hold their dances in the churches of the Establishment, and were wroth at being forbidden. In fine, though Mr. Paradyse's backers had reluctantly admitted that he might be unpopular here and there in the abstract, yet they had held like one man to their belief as to his popularity in the concrete, which reminds one of the tradesman who lost a shilling on every pair of boots he sold, but made his profit out of the quantity. And let no one doubt that the fallen Premier's supporters tried to console themselves in the usual way, by printing statistics to show how different it might have been if the constituencies had been otherwise; and the humorous papers of the party published cartoons of Mr. Paramount being puffed into Downing Street by the smoke of tobacco-pipes. These jests were very good, but they rang a little hollow, and the general impression was as of something confusing. Perhaps, however, the person most startled of all was he who had most reason to rejoice at this turn of the tide—Mr. Para-

mount himself. An angler who has been patiently waiting to catch one fish, and who lands a netful, may experience the sensations which this distinguished statesman felt. But Mr. Paramount was an impenetrable man, who let nothing of his surprise be seen to the public eye. Commanded by the Queen to form a Ministry, he summoned his lieutenants around him, and met them at Lord Rosemary's town house in Belgrave Square, which was palatial and commodious for such meetings. Lady Rosemary, who went to town to do the honours, wrote instantly to Mayrose to come to London, too, adding with her usual tact—no doubt lest he should scruple to seem presumptuous—that Mr. Paramount *particularly* desired his attendance. It was her ladyship who underlined the word.

Now if Mr. Paramount had one merit acknowledged even by his foes, it was that of knowing how to choose men. He might not resemble Pitt in other respects, but he did in this one, and it was a high compliment to Mayrose that the new Premier should be willing to employ him, untried as he was, and unknown to the world. Mayrose did not affect to consider it a compliment, for, in his modesty, he ascribed the honour to Lady Rosemary's sole agency; and in his heart of hearts he deplored that the opportunity would not now be given him of deserving his spurs before he obtained them. His pleasure at the overthrow of Mr. Paradyse was wholly patriotic, for his own purposes would have been better furthered had the late ad-

ministration remained in office throughout the Session. As an Opposition Speaker he could have poured out his entire soul in assailing a government whose policy he thought mistaken; but, with his own party in power, his situation was one of perplexity. If he refused to accept place, he could not, without a show of bump-tiousness unbecoming in one of his years, constitute himself a censor of his party; if, on the other hand, he took a post, he would be reduced to cultivating the official mysticism of style peculiar to Under-Secretaries, and to holding his peace altogether when not actually dragged into debate. In either event he would be to a great extent gagged. There was only this consolation, that in office he could labour with might and main to be of use to the community; so he arrived in London, resolved to abide by Lady Rosemary's advice, whatever it should be.

His hansom, coming straight from the station amid the racket and life of town on a bright winter morning, drew up among a great throng of carriages, which, after depositing their noble and right honourable occupants on the pavement, had wheeled off and arrayed themselves in a line with the horses' heads facing the house. This line of champing animals, who tossed their bits and studded the frosty earth with white flakes of foam, stretched half-way down one side of the square, and all the flashing liveries familiar to the West-end shone in it—the claret colour and cockade of Lord Beaujolais, who, it was already known, would return to his old post in the Household; the

white and scarlet of Lady Coralmere; Colonel Dandelion's grass-hued brougham; and glittering high amid them all, the black and yellow chariot of the Duke of Bumblebeigh, with its escutcheon of drones rampant, and its motto, "*Sans miel ni fiel.*"

Mayrose saw that he had lighted upon the very thick of the quarry for honours and emoluments, and he questioned whether his morning costume would do for such illustrious company; but to his great relief he was not shown into the room where the new rulers of the kingdom were assembled. A servant led him up a muffled staircase to Lady Rosemary's private boudoir, and there he remained alone a few minutes with some China pug-dogs, very rare and ugly, till the Countess joined him. She was all kind smiles and welcome, and if Mayrose had felt any remnant of nervousness at the thought of this meeting, it all melted away in the warmth of her looks. No allusion was made to Zellie. Lady Rosemary kissed him on the forehead, said a few laughing words about that "confidence" of which he had dreaded to be bereft because of Miss Pennywon's camelia, and then came to the important matter in hand.

"We shall not be together five minutes, Freddy, for I have left quite twenty ladies in the next room, and the gentlemen are downstairs parting what remains of the loaves and fishes among them."

"May I congratulate you on the Earl's appointment?" asked Mayrose, not doubting that the Earl

had been reinstated first on the list to the Keepership of the Waste Papers.

"Yes, I am to be Lady Keeper again," said she smiling, and making him sit down by her side; "but now we must speak about yourself. Mr. Paramount knows how much you would chafe at taking any office which might appear to be given you from mere patronage, so he wants you to move the Address to the Queen's Speech in the House of Lords. The Under Secretaryship of the Australian colonies will be kept open meanwhile, and when you have made your *début* in a speech which you must try to render as brilliant as you can so that it may dazzle everybody, then you will be gazetted, and people will say that your appointment was not a piece of favour but a piece of justice."

"This is kinder than I can express, dear Lady Rosemary," muttered Mayrose, who was really touched at the delicate thoughtfulness which had planned that his self-esteem might not suffer the slightest ruffling.

"You must thank Mr. Paramount," answered the Countess lightly, and striving after her generous wont to lessen the gratitude due to her. "Lord Albert Drone, the Duke's brother, is to be Secretary for Australia. He is very nice, and you will certainly find him easy to work with."

"I would work well with a Tartar to justify this unmerited favour," answered Mayrose with feeling.

"Oh but the favour will not be unmerited," insisted

the Countess. "There is not much to say generally in moving an Address to the Throne, but there is much in the manner of saying a little. Besides you can make an exception, and say a great deal—criticise the past government."

"I must try and forget that it is dead and buried then," laughed Mayrose; "at all events I will pray against being dull."

"That you could never be if you tried. Mr. Paramount speaks with positive enthusiasm of you, and I must tell you, Freddy, that you are already credited with having forced Mr. Dexter to retire, and with having gained us a seat with Sir Ham Pennywon. Mr. Dexter was growing to be a dangerous critic in the House; and Sir Ham, who has large city influence, was supposed to belong to the other side until you converted him."

"I assure you I have converted nobody," protested Mayrose, frowning a little to see the inevitable Sir Ham dog him even to this boudoir. "As to Mr. Dexter, dear Lady Rosemary, I meant to help him."

"Well it would not be prudent to confess that," laughed the Countess. "The exploits have been counted to you for 'party services,' and it is well to begin early with party services. Then I fancy Mr. Paramount will be more at his ease if you let him think he is indebted to you."

This was a new view, but whether it would have led to a discussion on political casuistry is not

ascertainable, for the few minutes which Lady Rosemary could give to her protégé were now over. A little clock stationed between two Dresden shepherdesses tinkled out the hour which had been fixed for a general partisan luncheon, and the Countess took Mayrose's arm to return among the ladies. They passed through a velvet door-curtain, along a room with miniature enamel paintings and Gobelins tapestry, and thence penetrated into the bower, where the silvery hubbub of feminine politics was rife. And it was a brave sight to see them all in their war-paint, rustling skirts, and exulting eyes — these pretty tryants of the misnomered weak sex, who, through their husbands, cousins, or other male belongings, were about to shake the Royal Sceptre as for a Transformation Scene over the Empire where the sun never sets. Favourite chaplains to be transfigured into deans, deans into bishops; young brothers to be shipped out as colonial governors; pet doctors to be knighted; ambassadorships to be intrigued for; commissionerships to be danced at; Garters, Bath ribbons, coronets, judges' ermine, Maid of honour rosettes to be begged for with appealing dimples, seized with rosy fingers, carried off in ecstasy—all these things whirled about like a living diorama before the open eyes of these delighted and delightful creatures. Nor had the term "*Paramount vice Paradyse*" any other sense in their minds than that of this diorama. Lady Coralmere was in the room, and so was comely Lady Beaujolais, and to the numerous other ladies whom

he had never seen (neither Zellie nor Violet were here) Mayrose was now introduced. There were some sunny Ladies Drone among them in corded silks and sable furs, and some chirupping, wide-awake Ladies Keane-Forester with otter-skin muffs, and some winsome ladies of that great house of Rodent-Midge, which has fed off the Budget without cease or loss of appetite since the Charter Day at Runnymede; and at the hands of all these blonde and brunette despots of our souls and bodies Mayrose endured the fate reserved to every man who is handsome, blithe-tempered, a bachelor, and who moreover stands alone with two dozen of the adverse sex scrutinising him. Perhaps he would have liked that the smiles and petting bestowed on him should have been less similar to those bestowed on a poodle-dog—for he detected a disquieting resemblance between the two—but then he was so self-possessed and ready of wit, so well-dressed, young, and teeming with good spirits, that ladies could not but treat him as essentially their own peculiar property. In a brief space they had all concurred in a scheme for attending the House of Lords in a galaxy on the opening of the session, and hearing this poodle-peer move his address.

"You will have to wear an uniform, Lord Mayrose," said Lady Coralmere, who dropped one of her gloves that he might have the happiness of picking it up.

"I think I can wear the Hiveshire Yeomanry uniform," laughed Mayrose, restoring the glove.

"Blue and silver, with a brass helmet," said a crimp-haired Lady Drone.

"It should be blue," approved Lady Beaujolais; "red does not show off so well against the scarlet benches in the House of Lords."

"I like gold better than silver—if there's a great deal of it," observed a Lady Rodent-Midge.

"And all the illustrated papers will publish your portrait," remarked Lady Coralmere.

"And biographical notices," added Lady Beaujolais.

"With the date of my birth and the rest blank," smiled Mayrose. At which there was a flattering outcry that blanks are easily filled up by those who please, and that men like nations, are the happiest who are too young to have a history. But in the midst of these dulcet encouragements a door downstairs was heard opening, and a unanimous soft "Ah!" from the ladies indicated that the half-hundred or so of salaried posts which form a government must probably have been filled up now, so that there stood no further impediment in the way of luncheon.

The surmise was correct. Statesmen feet trod through the hall below and, in cadence, ascended the staircase, all of them the lighter for the heavy weight of emoluments and responsibilities which they were thenceforth to carry. They surged on the landing and flowed into the ladies' room in a patriotic tide, screwing down their pencil-cases, thrusting lists into their waistcoat-pockets, and wearing jaunty yet

ruminant looks, as though each man felt that he should dearly love the particular post which his neighbour had got. There was the august Duke of Bumblebeigh, who cared for none of these things himself, but who, as the Nestor of the party, came to see that no one of his kinsmen was forgotten in the distribution, a point about which these kinsmen also took care themselves. His Grace was to his son Lord Hornette what the yellow and faded original of an engraving is to a later reprint of it. He had passed through times when it had been the fashion for every Briton of brains to sneer at dukes, but he had seen dukes and their power live down the sneerers, and now that he was tottering at his leisure towards the vault where his fathers lay, he could comfort himself with the reflection that dukes in general, and Dukes of Bumblebeigh in particular, would survive the sneers of the next generation also; aye, and of many a generation following. Beside him, alert on his boot-tips, stepped his younger and politic brother, Lord Albert, more widely known as Balbie Drone, the new Secretary for Australia, of whom we shall see more anon, for he was to be Mayrose's chief. Then, after massive Lord Stonehenge, the granite-head of this administration, and little Sir Tito Tumb, who fitted into round holes or square holes alike, came buoyant Lord Beaujolais, with silky beard, gaily trimmed, who cast an imperceptible nod at his wife, as if to assure her that the little bit of patronage she had desired for one of her relations had been effected precisely according to

her orders; and Lord Rosemary came, with laugh ever serene as healthy weather, and showing no appearance of being raised in his own esteem, or lowered in it, by his Lord-Keepership; and centrally in the throng, with followers before and followers behind, and strangely-blended looks of obedience and affected independence thrown on his path, like the *confetti*—some sugar, some plaster—showered on the Corso at Rome in Carnival time, came Mr. Paramount, towards whom Mayrose advanced with a few muttered words of thanks and homage.

The air of victory sat well on Mr. Paramount. Good humour, self-confident speech, and impervious reserve, made him the born leader of a shy and brooding people; so that those who talked of his dominancy as insecure neither knew the man nor the men who trooped after him. He shook Mayrose's hand with condescending cordiality, and administered to him the ointment of office in a few well-chosen words. "We have to thank you for winning us such a welcome recruit as Sir Ham Pennywon," he said.

Mayrose had judgment enough to see that he was in the position of a subordinate now, and must not contradict his commander, so he simply bowed with the aspect of a man who has enlisted and been given the shilling.

CHAPTER XVI.

Sir Ham's Partner.

SIR HAM sat taking wine in his dining room, after the ladies had retired; Mr. Dexter, who had been staying a week at Penny, was opposite him. A decanter of thirty-year port stood between the two.

"And ye say the paper 'ud sell well?" asked the city knight.

"I think it would be a certain success," replied the barrister.

"Just go into the figures again, Dexter. When ye fust spoke I couldn't help a-thinkin' that when last I drunk port of this brand, my poor boy Mike was a sittin' where you are, and I had a kind o' feelin' he might come in at any moment, and take his old place. Poor lad! poor lad! But don't mind me—it's a law paper ye're talkin' of, isn't it?"

"It is a paper of quite a new sort," answered Mr. Dexter in a tone of sympathy, as he cracked a walnut, "one we much want in England. The name would be the 'Reporter, and Law-Court Gazette,' and it would be wholly confined to legal news. There are some law papers now, but they are weekly reviews, and circulate only among professional men. The 'Repor-

ter' must be a daily penny journal, of the size of the ordinary dailies, and appeal to all classes of readers. You know what attractions assize and police reports have for most of the public; some people read nothing else in the papers."

"I always read the police news and criminal trials," assented Sir Ham, with interest.

"Just so. Well, the 'Reporter' would treat of these topics in a more thorough way than is possible to the average papers, who have to deal with everything. The French have a daily law paper, the 'Gazette des Tribunaux,' which has been a great success from the first; but I should aim at doing things on the grander scale, which distinguishes English journalism. The 'Reporter' would give the fullest accounts of the police-court cases, the assize trials, the lawsuits at Westminster and Lincoln's Inn; publish letters from foreign correspondents relating to important trials abroad; and, above all, print three or four well-written leaders a day to elucidate points of law, explain and criticise judgments. The paper ought to wield immense influence if well conducted, and I should try to engage barristers and solicitors of proved ability to write for it. If my plan were realised, people would go to the 'Reporter' for the most authentic legal records, as they go to 'Hansard' for parliamentary debates; and lawyers would learn to respect it as a high-class authority. As one of its subsidiary objects, the 'Reporter' would, of course, advocate necessary reforms in law and procedure, and

urge the necessity for codifying our numberless and intricate Acts of Parliament."

"And how much do ye say it 'ud cost to start the paper?"

"It requires about thirty thousand pounds to set a London daily paper fairly going, and another ten thousand to fall back upon," answered Mr. Dexter, cracking another walnut. "I have two or three thousand pounds myself, and shall be able to get about a dozen of my friends to risk from two thousand to five thousand each in the enterprise. We shall make a joint-stock thing of it, with limited liability."

There was a moment's silence. Sir Ham rubbed his head, and centered his round eyes on the barrister.

"Look'ee here, Dexter," he said suddenly, leaning forward, "supposin' you and I do this business together friendly like—I find the money, and you set the paper working?"

"Oh, that is impossible, Sir Ham. Supposing I failed with my friends; we should each lose our stake, and there would be an end of the matter. But if I dragged you into a bad venture I should owe you forty thousand pounds, and never be able to repay you!"

"Aye, if ye failed; but even if ye did, I shouldn't be beggared by forty thousand pounds, my lad," replied the Prime Warden of the Sausage-Makers with

a touch of city pomp, smileless and wheezing, "I don't think ye'll fail though, ye've a long head on your young shoulders, and ye've behaved handsome to me too—I don't care who hears me say it."

Mr. Abel Dexter feigned the utmost surprise at Sir Ham's proposal. Evincing none of the suspicious eagerness peculiar to scheme promoters, he proceeded to descant on the countless hazards of newspaper ventures. He even doubted whether his sense of indebtedness to Sir Ham would not paralyse the reckless nerve needed by those who embark in great speculations; and this was the more disinterested of him as, be it said at once, the twelve friends who were to assist him with sums of from two to five thousand pounds each were evolved, the whole dozen of them, from his inner consciousness. But the more he sought to dissuade the Knight, the greater became the latter's obstinacy to have a share in the paper. In the course of a week Mr. Abel Dexter had made great—indeed, wondrous—progress in his host's good books. To begin with, Sir Ham was well aware now that Mayrose had urged the tradesmen of Hiveborough to oppose him, and that if Mr. Dexter had persevered in his contest he, Sir Ham, would not have been elected. Moreover, first class Oxford men did not abound on Sir Ham's visiting list, and such few of them as he knew did not treat him with that comforting deference which a millionaire Alderman has a right to expect, and receives east of Temple Bar. The ex-M.P. had raised the city Knight in his own

esteem. He had done homage to him as a great financial oracle, a worshipful magistrate, and a benefactor of humanity (through the cheap saveloys and the utilisation of those oyster-shells), and yet he had borne himself with tact enough constantly to remind his host that it was no mere stripling fresh from college who thus burned incense under his nose, but a rising man, who had sat in Parliament, frayed with statesmen, and who, either as a politician or an advocate, would certainly end by leaving his mark on society.

With men like Sir Ham there is no medium between the extreme of suspiciousness and that of blind trust. The Sausage-Maker had passed all his life thinking that men wanted to overreach him, and he had so studiously put himself on his guard that—without meaning it, let us be sure—he had generally overreached his neighbours. This is what the world calls experience. But the experience which makes one see in every human being a possible rogue melts at contact with a man who asks for nothing, renders an un hoped-for service, and soothes the innermost fibres of one's heart with flattery the most skilful and repeated. Perhaps, too, a man who has got all that is to be had out of mistrustfulness—that is money, for it yields little else—grows tired of it in the end, as we do of most things on which we have fattened; then he pines to lavish the pent-up store of his confidence on somebody, and the first trustable person who comes in his way has the luck of a man who

passes under an overladen tree at the time of a wind-fall. This had been Mr. Dexter's luck.

"See ye here," blurted out the Knight, closing a long discussion with a thud of his fat fist on the table. "Ye said that 'ownin' a noospaper gave a man power?"

"Undoubtedly — a first-rate paper confers great power."

"Well, I want to have power," rejoined the Knight, confidentially. "Ye wouldn't judge by the look of my banker's account that I'd got much to wish for, but money don't help ye along much with the 'ristocracy, and in England the 'ristocracy is everything. My Mike used to say to me, poor lad—'Father, ye must be a peer, there's nothing like it.' And now, though he's dead, I'll become somebody for my Mary's sake. What do ye think of my Mary, Dexter?"

Whether he was in reality troubled by the question, or only wished to appear so, Mr. Dexter reddened—

"Language would but feebly express my admiration for Miss Pennywon's beauty and grace," he said politely.

"Aye, isn't she a good and pooty little thing?" exclaimed Sir Ham, whose eyes glowed with port and fatherly pride. "Well, if I was to dress her up in white satin, cover her with diamonds, and put all the scrip of Lombard Street into her pockets, there's some of the 'ristocracy wouldn't take her becos' I

made my money in the city. That young Lord Mayrose is one of this sort. I know he despises me."

"Surely no. He has little right to do that."

"He does it without the right," said Sir Ham, gloomily. "Maybe he feels a bit sore at my havin' part of his old estates, but the truth is he's a lord and I ain't. Yet I like that young man. He's got a pair of eyes that look at ye straight and mild, like the spring sun. Ye don't see such eyes behind a counter, because in bisness you're obliged to stare so plaguey sharp at what people's a-doin'. That's why I want my Mary to marry one of them lords as has never put his finger to ledger, but speaks bold and soft, carries himself grand and perlite, and acts likewise; and ye can jist help me, Dexter."

"Help you to marry Miss Pennywon?" inquired Mr. Dexter, as if he misunderstood.

"No; but help me to get into the sort o' society where she'll have good husbands to choose from. I don't want to force my Mary into marriage; she shall wed whom she pleases, bless her heart; but to speak the truth to ye, we don't know any of the quality. All the people as come to our parties are city folks, and though we got a *Honourable* once he borrowed twenty pund of me to play whist with, he did, and has forgotten to call since. Now when ye helped me into Parliament, Dexter, ye put me in the way of makin' proper friends, and by this paper o' yours you'll bring me acquaintance among young lawyer chaps, writers, painters, and so on, who'll get talking

o' my parties and sayin' I'm a Hart Connoisier* like Ben Lombard, who hadn't cheese to his bread thirty years ago, but dines with the Royal Academy now, becos he's always a-buyin' statues of females with no clothes on."

"If a reputation of art patron is all you want, that is easily procured," laughed Abel Dexter.

"Ay, my lad, but it's jist like you to do a good turn and then make light of it. You and I'll be friends all our lives, and first I'll find money for the noospaper, so let's go into figures."

Sir Ham Pennywon was never slothful when there were figures flying about. He rang for pens and paper, and had soon drafted a contract, making of the unborn "Reporter" three shares, valuable at 12,000*l.* each, whereof two were to be his and the third Mr. Dexter's; with power to the latter to buy up one-fourth of Sir Ham's two shares (so as to become half-partner) any time within ten years on payment of 6,000*l.* with compound interest at five per cent.

When the butler returned at the end of an hour to announce tea, he beheld Sir Ham with his coat off, for the room was hot, and perspiring over the fifteenth clause of his draft, while sheets already written on were littered among the desert plates. "'*If either of the partners should disagree about any of these here clauses,*'" stuttered Sir Ham; "but they won't dis-

* Art connoisseur.

agree, eh Dexter? What is it?" and the Knight made a blot.

"Her ladyship sent me to say that tea was on the table, Sir Ham," said the butler.

"But it ain't half-past nine yet."

It was half-past ten, but Sir Ham had been so taken up with his scheme that he had not watched the minutes go. The barrister, somewhat disconcerted by the business-like spirit which Sir Ham was evincing in the venture of his capital, now suggested that the draft should be prepared, when they both went up to town, by Mr. Deedes, and this being agreed to, they adjourned to the tea-room.

"Jane, Mary," ejaculated Sir Ham, trotting in behind his guest, "Dexter and I are partners; we're going to found a noospaper together."

"Deary me, Ham!" exclaimed Lady Pennywon; but Mary, busy with the sugar-basin and tongs behind the silver urn, dropped lumps into the cups, and made no remark.

"You don't say nothing, Mary," cried Sir Ham from his arm-chair. "What is it you most read in the noospaper, my dear?"

"I don't often read the papers, papa. When I do it's the accidents and trials," answered truthful Mary.

"Well, my dear, this'll be a paper choke-full of trials. It'll be like a novel. It's Dexter who invented it."

"Mr. Dexter has a great deal of talent," answered Mary, beginning to pour cream into the cups.

CHAPTER XVII.

Miss Pennywon's Dower.

Now a foreigner contended that one hundred and fifty sentiments could be expressed in a kick: so a young lady can give one hundred and fifty intonations to the remark that a gentleman has talent, and Mary Pennywon's intonation was not that which Mr. Dexter would have loved. Whilst enthralling Sir Ham, and climbing to a high pinnacle in the respect of Lady Pennywon, the barrister had made but little progress with Mary. She had been civil from the first, and remained so; but Mr. Dexter found his advances towards more genial intercourse repelled by a barrier of ice, rather remarkable from the fact that iciness was no part of Mary Pennywon's ordinary character. She was a methodical little person—tidy, plain-spoken, and demure. She liked to see the chairs straight, the mantel-shelves well dusted, and the poor whom she patronised wearing stockings properly darned; but her talk was spirited enough, and her hazel glances had often sparkled with amusement in company less delectable than Mr. Dexter's. Why, then, did she seem to view this gentleman with a cool and careful eye?

This is what Sir Ham's visitor had asked himself more than once, and during the few days that intervened between the election and that when the new M.P. and his family were to leave for town he had redoubled in the most patient way his efforts to please. To nine hundred and ninety-nine women out of a thousand he would have appeared the most delightful of beings, and Lady Pennywon, who felt at home with him, thanks to the deftness with which he always placed his conversation on a level with hers, declared that he must be a blessing to his mother, or to his aunt, when she learned with concern that he was motherless. There is a great art in being able to heighten or lower one's chats by an octave to suit all tongues; and a man is no true talker unless he remember that his intellect should be like a piano. Mr. Dexter, who could dissert on protoplasm and natural selection in such wise as to comfort the most self-satisfied Rugbeian who ever bored a College wine party, would, when Sir Ham was not within earshot, lead his lady to dilate on the fascinations of that shop in Pudding Lane, and take a pleasure in the retrospect which drew a smile even from Mary. Sir Ham's daughter showed Mr. Dexter no outward aversion. Her unaccountable coldness was inward, and perceptible only to himself; externally she behaved towards him with the correct blandness of young ladies who have been trained at a fashionable Brighton school, and desire to play their parts dutifully towards their parents' friends.

On the night when the partnership had been decided Mr. Dexter got little sleep, tossing about with reflections buzzing in his head as bees in a hive. But on the morrow he was serene as ever, and profiting by the good humour which he had excited at breakfast by recounting how he had once been chased by an Oxford Proctor and fined ten shillings for smoking a cigarette, he said, rising from table:—

“Will you allow me to go with you to the village school, Miss Pennywon; I think I heard you say last night you were going to carry some books there?”

“I thought you were going to London to see Mr. Deedes about your newspaper?” rejoined Mary.

“Sir Ham and I shall not start till the one o’clock train, and I have more than two hours before me.”

“Let Mr. Dexter walk with you, Mary, my dear,” said Lady Pennywon, preparing to start on her household duties, with a basketful of keys numerous enough to keep the tea and sugar of a whole county in custody. “It’s a sight for sore eyes to see them children, Mr. Dexter; but wrap yourself up warm, Mary, my dear, for it has been snowin’.”

“You’ll see it’s a proper school, Dexter, which I built myself, and cost a thousand pun’,” remarked Sir Ham, toddling towards the door with a sheaf of letters in both his round hands. “The boys and gals are taught their Bibles, and to respect their betters, which is the choicest schoolin’ I know of.”

“Certainly the best of all,” assented Mr. Dexter.

"Come if you please, Mr. Dexter," answered Mary, quietly. "The children may amuse you, and it is possible you may amuse them;" with which little thrust she withdrew to put on her bonnet and cloak, whilst her remarkable parents separated, the one to his study with his letters, the other to the kitchen regions.

These kitchen regions were Lady Pennywon's paradise; and the hour she devoted to them every morning was the happiest of her day. Somewhat reluctantly Sir Ham had allowed his wife to remain her own housekeeper, and it was with that softened look attaching to all occupations which recall a poetic past that the worthy lady reviewed the pantry and sculleries, put the saucepans through their facings, and dipped her nose into the jelly moulds. She would stand in her broad dress of silk and crape, prodding the raw joints with a fork, holding up giblets to the light, and testing by the naïvest known process the freshness of the fish: so that the purveyors of Penny brought their wares with a depressed feeling that it was no use carrying short weight or inferior quality to this house. Most depressed of all, though, was the pork-butcher, for, having to face in her ladyship a critic of professional competence, this miserable man was haunted by the continuous fear of adverse verdicts as to his sausages, pigs'-faces, and spare-ribs, nor would anything save a blameless conscience have borne him through it. Need it be added that there was no waste at Penny, and that, in despite of this, the sleekness of

the servants would have qualified them to be German princes or Spanish queens.

Mary came down all in black and hugging a parcel of novels with her muff. Mr. Dexter relieved her of them.

"They are for my friend Miss Marvell," she said, issuing on to the snow, which crisped under her small feet like silk being torn.

"You had better give me your arm," proposed Mr. Dexter. "These mornings with frozen snow on the ground and the sun overhead are apt to be slippery."

"The schools are quite close," said Mary, nevertheless giving him her arm, "but you are surely not going to stay with the children all through the class?"

"You shall send me away when I am *de trop*. But I delight in schools. I saw Lord Mayrose's at Springfield some months ago, and should like to compare."

Mary answered nothing, but seemed absorbed in some sparrows who were hopping over the snow, leaving footprints like little stars.

"Lord Mayrose always supported his village schools they say, though he had so little money," resumed Mr. Dexter. "He is just one of those men who deserve to be rich."

"What could riches do for him?" asked Mary.

"Not so much for him as for others. Have you heard that he is going to marry Lady Azalea Carol? I suppose it is being talked of in Hiveborough, for a

letter I received this morning from one of my former constituents mentions the rumour."

"Lord Mayrose is going to be married!" echoed Mary calmly, but—it was perhaps fancy—Mr. Dexter thought he could detect the faintest flutter in the small hand that lay on his arm—

"Yes, she brings him twenty thousand pounds a year. He has lost no time since his return, but it was urgent he should make a rich marriage if he wished to get on."

"Get on?" said Mary with surprise, and the fluttering in Mary's hand continued.

"I mean get on as a peer," explained Mr. Dexter. "Poor peers are terribly handicapped if they have any ambition in them, as no doubt Mayrose has."

"Do you mean then that Lord Mayrose is marrying for money?" ejaculated Mary; then with a sudden animation that sent a quaver to her soft voice: "Oh, the man that does that is the meanest of created beings; he deserves no happiness in life, and I am sure God sends him none!"

Mr. Dexter evinced no astonishment, he neither raised his eyebrows nor turned to look at Mary.

"Lady Azalea is extremely beautiful," he said composedly, "and this is certainly a love-match, for the two have known each other from childhood, only Mayrose could not have afforded the marriage if he was poor, that is all. But, talking of beauties, Miss Pennywon, what a charming person your village

schoolmistress is! I could not help noticing her in church last Sunday."

"Yes, she is my friend, we were at school together," answered Mary, as if glad that the conversation were changing, for her voice still trembled and there was a flush on her face. "You know Grace Marvell's father was ruined, and I am trying to persuade her to come and live with us as companion; but I have not succeeded yet, for she is very proud and prefers her independence."

"It strikes me, though, she is thrown away in that school."

"That's what I tell her, and she is so accomplished, so gifted you can't think. Ah, there's a girl who would make any ambitious man a good wife. If you ever think of marrying, Mr. Dexter [here Mary made an attempt at playfulness], you might go far without finding the equal of Miss Marvell."

"Unfortunately my heart is already bestowed, Miss Pennywon."

"Oh!" said Mary, archly.

They had just come in sight of the village school, a building of red brick, adorned with a small stone belfry, a bell, and a clock, under which a black marble tablet recorded in gold letters the day when Lady Pennywon had graciously laid the foundation-stone. Abel Dexter paused, and bent his eyes on Mary with a look at once supplicating and tender:—

"Yes, Miss Pennywon," he said with a lover's hesitation, "when I came here a week ago my heart

was still my own; but will you allow me to tell you that since I first saw you—”

To his dismay Mary interrupted him with a mirthful laugh, whilst her eyes sparkled with sly humour. She had released her arm, her black dress stood out like a shadow on the snow around; and her features, from which emotion had now faded, were rosily tinted by the prickly air of the morning.

“Oh, Mr. Dexter, who do you take me for? Do you really think me silly enough to believe that you are in love with me?”

“If I swore it?” he answered reddening.

“Fie, you mustn’t swear to fibs! We are alone, and forgive me for telling you that from the day when you came into our house I wondered what could be your motive. I never thought you had resigned your seat in Parliament for the reasons you gave; and as to our company, why we are simple, though rich, and I doubt whether you would have endured us so patiently if you had not some scheme. That is why I was not surprised yesterday when I heard that my father was to become your partner; but if now you think to take me into partnership too, because I am to inherit some money, I must answer you that you are pushing your speculations too far.”

“Miss Pennywon, I give you my solemn word that if you had not sixpence I should love you better than any woman I have ever known.”

“You are too polite to speak otherwise, but your love would be like Lord Mayrose’s for Lady Azalea

—if I were poor you could not afford to marry me, lest I should handicap you! Well, Mr. Dexter, I am one of those foolish girls who, even if moneyless, would not care to be looked upon as an incumbrance. I hope my husband may consider my money as the smallest part of my dower — Your servant,” and making him an ironical little curtsy she fled into the school-house, leaving him on the snowy pathway, where he cut rather a sorry figure.

“I committed a blunder,” he mused half-aloud, “it is evident that camelia interview with Mayrose has turned her head. If I had heard of it in time, I would not have been in such a hurry to resign. However, when Mayrose is married, she will become more tractable; and egad! she is worth winning.”

Abel Dexter believed in the report of Mayrose's marriage. The rumour had come into Hiveborough through one of the maids at Elmwood, who was engaged to a young carpenter in the town, which young carpenter having a sister married to a hair-cutter in the market-place, the intelligence had quickly been poured into the ears of all the people who came to be shaved. According to the maid's version Mayrose had not fallen from his horse out hunting, but had thrown himself on to his knees in a field and vowed never to rise unless Lady Zell allowed him to put up the banns. This story was too likely to be discredited.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Io Triumphe!

HER MAJESTY graciously deigned to open Parliament in person that year, and mobs of her liege subjects marshalled by the police between Buckingham Palace and Westminster enjoyed the pageant of Life Guards, gilt coach, cream-coloured horses with milk tails, Beef-eaters, and the yet more beatific vision of the Royal Crown being borne on the knees of an old gentleman, who held it as if it were a piece of pastry. One of these days the economists, who have lodged British Royalty in a house well suited for a hospital, will discover that the way to Westminster is much shorter in a four-wheeled cab, with a shilling fare and an extra twopence for the Crown carried as luggage on the top; but meanwhile the antique pomp causes almost as much pleasure as the saving resulting from the cab-hire would, and thus once again the mobs were pleased.

The reading of Mr. Paramount's speech from the Throne on the occasion of his return to power, would have been an exciting ceremony even if managed by the Lord Chancellor and the Commissioners in cocked hats; but it was generally felt that the presence

of Royalty lent an additional and fitting lustre to the new Premier's triumph. As the curiosity was great to hear what the Ministry had to say, the Foreign Ambassadors were all at their posts, in a serried row of golden swallow-tails; and with well-oiled countenances shone the Envoys of the heathen Chinese, Japanese, and other wondrous Semitic "ese." Peeresses and their daughters undulated in a restless sea of diamonds, silks, and satins, crested with plumes, Mechlin lace, and *tulle bouillonnée*. The Peers temporal, gorgeous in their scarlet robes and lapets of ermine, with four rows of black tails—three, two, or one, according to their several degrees—and the Reverend Fathers in God cloaking the episcopal bench in waves of sable satin and lawn, completed the historic scene, on which the light streamed grandly through the stained glass windows, tipping the cornices, paintings, and regal coats of arms with long arrows of gold, and impressing even the reporters in the gallery with the occasional beauty of things human.

It was two o'clock when the Lord Chancellor gave the assemblage her Majesty's commands to be seated, and half-past two when, Mr. Paramount's speech being read, the Queen retired with flourish of trumpets, Princes, Princesses, Blackrod, Chamberlain, Comptrollers, and other sovereign persons all out-vying one another in the gaudiness of their raiments. By the same occasion Mr. Speaker, newly elect, caught up his robes like petticoats in muddy weather, and

shuffled away with the Mace staggering in front of him on a pair of venerable shoulders; and the Peers, treading on one another's heels, swept back also to the robing-room to divest themselves of their purple. At this point the sight was properly over, but the Ambassadors, the reporters, and the Peeresses remained, and so did a batch of faithful Commons, who stuck fast, like shell-fish to the bar, whispering that they wanted to hear the speeches on the Address—and especially Lord Mayrose's. There is not generally such wishfulness as this regarding the speeches of young Peers, but thanks to feminine influence, this was an exceptional case, and Mayrose's name was somehow in every mouth. When ladies take to sounding a man's trumpet—an instrument which, by the way, a man had best sound for himself in these our times, if he wants to be heard afar—then the crowd which hurries up is like the gathering of the clans. Few of the visitors then in the House of Lords had known Mayrose a month before, or wanted to know him; but they knew the three Countesses of Rosemary, Beaujolais, and Coralmere, whose social flats were as immutable as the laws which went to work on Daniel; Society also knew the ladies of the great houses of Drone, Keane-Forester, and Rodent-Midge, who had been celebrating the young Peer's graces, wit, and genius; and never had popular actor a more determined *claque* than that which mustered to witness Mayrose's first performance. The young Viscount was conscious

that there was something histrionic in the whole affair, and possibly felt a trifle sheepish as he buttoned his white gloves opposite the glass in the robing-room and took a final survey of himself to see that his blue-and-silver uniform was creaseless. That the small aspects of history may not be overlooked, let it be stated that he feared his moustache tips were too much waxed, and a hesitation possessed him as to whether he should keep his helmet in his hands whilst speaking or lay it on his bench. However, the genuine heartiness of old Eton and University friends helped in a great measure to steady him and soothe his distractions. Outstretched hands stopped him in the painted lobbies, patted him on the back, and hailed him everywhere with words so frank and cheerful, that they seemed to clear the very air around him. Lord Hornette said to him kindly, "Well, Mayrose, you are to step ahead of us all to-day!" and Dolly Drone hastening up from the dining-room, where he had been refreshing himself with Stilton and bottled beer whilst the Queen was desiring his attendance, wrung his fingers and exclaimed, "By Jove, old man, all the women will be throwing you their handkerchiefs if you don't mind!"

If nothing but a compliment of the most proper kind had been implied in the throwing of the handkerchiefs, the ladies might probably have gone this length with pleasure, for Mayrose's entry seemed to occasion them general and lively satisfaction, which they testified by bringing opera-glasses to bear on

him. It was but natural that he should have been careful to have his uniform well made; and its sober tint and soldierly facings gave him much the look of a Prussian officer as he walked to his seat with his helmet under his arm and his sword slung up and quietly clinking.

At a glance he noticed that Lady Rosemary, Zellie, and Violet were in the House, and as there were some minutes more to be passed before the Lord Chancellor installed himself on the woolsack, he left his seat to talk with his friends. But he could not exchange more than a shake of the hand with either Zellie or Violet, who were nestling on the Peers' benches, for Peeresses were leaning towards him in all directions claiming bows and recognition, so that for a few moments the chattering and musical laughter of their ladyships rose above the modulation usual in that House, and made the two clerks on a cross bench smile grimly under their new-powdered wigs. If it can be questioned whether the dignity of Senatorial proceedings is enhanced by ladies' assistance, there is little doubt that the joviality of the proceedings is so, and Mayrose truly liked this light introduction to graver business. But everything has an end, and by the time the favoured Viscount had bandied trifles enough to make him think he was in a drawing-room, or in the slips of a private stage just before the acting of a charade, the Peers had flocked in by twos and threes till the number of them exceeded two hundred. Hereon Lady Coralmere,

bending over him till one of the white feathers in her hair almost kissed his brow, whispered that she had never seen such a full House as this congregated in his honour; and it was with this assurance chiming its melody in his ears that Mayrose threaded his way back to his bench just as the Chancellor was effecting his imposing march up the House. On taking his seat Mayrose was attracted by a black kid hand waved affably to him over the bar, and he perceived it was that of Sir Ham Pennywon, who had lately taken oath never to conspire against his Sovereign or to interfere with the Act of Settlement—an Act of which, be it mentioned, he had then heard for the first time. Not to have acknowledged the Knight's courtesy or to have done so with coldness, would have looked like conceit under the circumstances; so Mayrose nodded with a smile.

But now the lull of a House full packed occurred of a sudden, as if someone had said "Let us pray." Sons of Peers were grouped round the steps of the throne, and the diplomatic gallery seemed to be more crowded than it was before. The French Ambassador had put his double eye-glass over the bridge of his nose, and the American Minister, too grand a being for uniform, had remitted to his pockets the plum-coloured gloves he had bought for the eye of Majesty. The tinted windows continued to bathe the scene with soft blue and red light, and, excepting the throne and the two seats beside it, not a sitting-place in the House was vacant. All eyes converged towards May-

rose, the Lord Chancellor bent his head towards him, conveying a half-wink, and with statesmen below him, statesmen opposite, and nobles pressed round him everywhere, Mayrose stood up and in a clear voice said: "My Lords, I have the honour to move an humble address in reply to her Majesty's gracious speech . . ."

We are not going to report the speech, but it was an excellent one, as was admitted on the morrow by newspapers of all parties.

Nor did it sound, except for the modesty of its exordium, like the first effort of a young performer. It was earnest, sensible, and bold—the discourse of a highly-trained scholar and gentleman, who spoke from a well-stocked mind and was in no danger of emitting nonsense. As to delivery Mayrose had served an apprenticeship in oratory at the Cambridge Union, and he may have remembered the example of that self-possessed village priest who, being asked how it was that, preaching one day before a bench of cardinals he had been in no wise abashed, answered, "I consider my congregations as so many cabbages, and red cabbages for a change make no difference." But besides all this Zellie was there. As he warmed to his work, Mayrose felt that sweet, pensive eyes were riveted on him, and the desire to show her that he was not a man who yielded on all points to Lord Hornette, must have had something to do with strengthening his voice and making him utter things which evoked cheer upon cheer, not only from his

own side of the House but from the opposite party—who gave him the generous encouragement as much from surprise as from admiration. The speech was a surprise from first to last. There was the noble lord who wore gaiters of a past age, and had never heard anything like it, and the noble lord who made an acoustic horn of his hand and thought it astonishing, and the noble lord who habitually dozed during these solemnities and could not explain why it was he remained awake now. Towards the close Mayrose strayed from the actual topics of the address to general remarks on the policy of his party and on that of the party who had been turned out (here the Opposition cheers were much fainter), but there was never a wildness in his utterance, never a fault in taste or judgment. What hopeful things he had to say he said with feeling, and his criticisms struck the harder as they were temperate and respectful. The speech concluded at the end of half an hour's sustained attention, not in loud and prolonged cheers, for their lordships indulge in few such, but in cheers very flattering, and a universal hum of appreciative conversation.

At the same time the personages in the diplomatic gallery turned about and compared impressions.

"C'est un grand pays qui produit de tels jeunes gens," remarked the French Ambassador, shutting up his glasses and addressing his American colleague.

"L'Angletair ne prodouce pas boccoo de ces joon gens," answered the American in an oracular way.

“Je n’ai pas compris un seul mot de ce qu’il a dit, mais il a une tête bien sympathique,” opined a pretty Ambadress, preparing to go away, and Tung-Inye-Tcheek of the Chinese mission pulled the brocade skirt of a brother attaché and appeared to say that the words of the young Mandarin seemed to have been inspired by Kung-Sseu the Pole of Light.

But while these things were being spoken in the gallery, Colonel Dandelion, the “whip,” who had stood watchful behind the bar during the whole oration, was in despair and would have torn out bunches of his hair had he had any to spare. “It’s a positive ruin he shouldn’t be in the Commons, he’s just the man we want,” observed this knowing politician ruefully, and hurried away to bear the tidings to Mr. Paramount.

This tribute, that of Mr. Paramount himself, who by-and-by made a point of congratulating him, that of two-thirds of the Peers in the House who followed him out when the much eclipsed Seconder had had his say, that of Sir Ham Pennywon, who caught him by the hands in the sight of all mankind—all these should have been trophies to move any man to pride; but, like many a gladiator or matador who has seen but one face among the thousands acclaiming him, so Mayrose cared but for one tribute of the many he received—a deep, rapid look with a tear in it, which came from Zellie.

CHAPTER XIX.

Violet's Balm.

ZELLIE had been listening in rapt attention. With eyes glistening and lips half parted in excitement, she had drunk in every word; and the cheers which exploded round her struck echoes in her heart under the form of great throbs which were almost audible to her sister. Violet had quick wits, and she had passed a considerable number of minutes since the day of the Kingschase run in putting two and two together. Zellie's agitation, Mayrose's constrained manner and needless departure from Elmwood were factors in a quotient very simple to read; but Violet's reading, though a natural one, was at variance with the truth. Seeing no reason why Mayrose should not propose to Zellie, and be married on the first convenient date, she supposed that Zellie's evident love for him was not returned; and this made her indignant. The crime of insensibility is the greatest which a man can commit in woman's eyes, and if Mayrose had been composed enough to observe Violet, he might have noticed a pronounced shade of coldness in her mien as she shook hands with him before his speech.

This coldness was also expressed in her ride home with her father and mother. While the Lord Keeper of the Waste Papers was enthusiastic in praise of "Freddy's great hit"—and while Lady Rosemary chimed in with admiring monosyllables, Violet was pleased to see nothing uncommon in the speech. Lord Hornette had spoken quite as well, said she, at a certain agricultural dinner, and had besides contrived to make people laugh, which was always an essential in these cases; and then she did not like an Englishman to dress himself up in a blue tunic. Now eloquence is a great charmer of women, and any feminine jury of twelve would have put Violet out of court. Lord Rosemary did so on the spot. "It was really a good speech, Vie," ejaculated he, "and what I liked about it was its Oxford flavour. Cambridge generally sends us such argumentative men."

"And it was in such perfect taste," observed Lady Rosemary.

"I don't say it was a bad speech, but the Lords cheered as if they had never heard a sensible thing before," said tenacious Violet.

"It would have been much more cheered in the House of Commons," replied the Lord Keeper. "Ten years in the other House would have brought Freddy to the top of the tree."

"He will succeed well as it is," remarked Lady Rosemary.

"Oh, yes, provided he makes a rich marriage," assented the Lord Keeper, airily. "If poor Coral-

mere were gone, I think Freddy would have a fine chance. Beaujolais whispered to me to look what a fuss Lady Coralmere was making all through the sitting."

"How can Lord Beaujolais say such things, my dear?" answered the Countess in a deprecating tone.

"Yes, of course, my dear—I beg pardon. But then there's Miss Pennywon, or any other young person of good looks and dower. Freddy must find someone before the season is over to give dinners for him in that big house."

"I think it's very mean of men to care so much about dining, papa," exclaimed Violet with flashes in her blue eyes.

"Well, miss, if you had a few brothers, and I had nothing to divide between you and Zell, you might be anxious too about the dinner-side of life," smiled the Earl. And in all that his lordship sinned not, for he was aware of no cause or impediment why Freddy's matrimonial or prandial prospects should not be discussed as freely as any country cousin's.

But the while Zellie glanced out of the window at the passing cabs and crowds, at the newsboys selling evening copies of the papers with her Majesty's Speech, at the City tide of omnibuses flooding westward to dinner and to tea, and she said nothing. Once or twice, indeed, when Violet was assailing Mayrose's success with her little pin-thrusts, the blood mantled in pink waves to Zellie's cheeks, and her lips slightly quivered; but she showed no other sign

of hearing what was said, and so Violet babbled on guilelessly, not suspecting that she was a cause of pain. But she was soon to learn what she had done. The sisters had rooms adjoining each other, and on this particular evening the maid whom they shared in common was to dress them for a dinner at the Duke of Bumblebeigh's; but instead of ringing for this attendant immediately on arriving home, Violet came into Zellie's room as her custom was for half-an-hour's talk and some tea. A tiny copper kettle stood on the grate-bracket, hissing its steam into the room, and a tea service in Sèvres china was set on a small table, with its cream jug, and rolled wafers of bread-and-butter all ready. Zellie and Violet loved to make their tea themselves, without servant's help, and this half-hour they spent nibbling at those wafers of bread-and-butter, and chatting over the queer things or people they had seen during the day, was always a cozy one. This time, however, when Violet returned from her own room into Zellie's after taking off her dress and putting on a rosy *peignoir*, Zellie said, impatiently, with her lips set, "Please take your tea into your own room, Violet. I want to be alone."

Violet stood surprised in the doorway, and with both hands in her hair, which she had begun to let down. "Why, what's the matter, Zell?"

"I want to be alone," repeated Zellie, in a tone as peevish as her gentle voice could assume. She was still dressed, and was standing opposite her toilet glass drawing off her gloves, and throwing them on

the table. That glass reflected a very pretty but troubled face, with a flush of stung pride that fevered her whole frame; and Violet quailed a little at it.

"I won't go, Zellie, till you tell me what I've done to make you cross," she answered, ruefully, with a lock of hair falling over her eyes; and saying this, she softly closed the door and stole in.

Then Zellie turned upon her, as girls will when wounded by their sisters. No dove could have been milder than Zellie, and no diamond was purer than her childlike heart; but even doves will turn and diamonds cut.

"Why, what have I done that you should wish to tease me and make me unhappy?" she broke out, unclasping one of her bracelets with petulant force. "You've been doing it for days—you know you have!"

"I tease you!" echoed poor Violet, letting a whole cascade of locks fall over her eyes in her amazement.

"Yes, teasing me, and acting as no sister who loved me would have done; and then you say your prayers at night!" faltered unreasonable Zellie, tearing rather than unlocking the other trinkets off her white wrists.

"I didn't think you would ever speak to me so unkindly as that," murmured Violet, looking ready to cry; "and if it's because I spoke about that speech, I wish there had been no speech—there!"

"I call it wicked and unsisterly," was Zellie's an-

swer, as she turned her back on Violet and made as if she would cut short all discussion. But in that movement Violet saw that some tears were welling out of her sister's eyes, and this disarmed her. She followed Zellie with quick forgiving steps, twined an arm round her neck and kissed her.

"Don't call me unsisterly, Zell. I was angry with Freddy, because it's hard to be patient with a man who looks so pleased with himself when—when—in fact, dear, I knew you were miserable."

She would perhaps have been wiser in avoiding this subject, for there are topics too delicate for allusion even between sisters. But Zellie and Violet had always been as one, having no secrets from each other—before this secret had arisen—and to have gone back to her room, leaving Zellie to become good-tempered again at her leisure, was more than Violet would have had the heart to do. This was not the first symptom of Zellie's unhappiness either; and Violet much wished to be rid of the load that was oppressing them both, or at least to bear her share of it. So it was with an air of protection as well as loving repentance for any sorrow she might have occasioned that she put her arms round Zellie and kissed her, once, twice, most tenderly. Then Zellie forgave.

"You mustn't mind me, Vie, what I said was cruel and foolish—I know it; but I thought you were teasing me."

"I didn't mean to tease you, dear; but come and

sit down; tea will do you good; and we'll talk," said Violet, at the same time beginning to unhook her sister's dress: and it needed but a few touches of her deft fingers to robe Zellie in a drapery like her own and to set her in a low easy-chair near the fire. Every woman is at heart a nurse would be a truer proverb than another which begins similarly, for after Violet had taken up the little copper kettle and poured its steaming floods on to the leaves whose aroma soon filled the room, and after she had knelt down on the hearthrug at Zellie's feet with the plate of bread-and-butter in her hands to give herself a countenance, what intuitive wisdom of womanhood was it that made her divine the one right balm for Zellie's sufferings?

"I was out of patience with Freddy, Zell; but do you know I think he is very fond of you, dear," said she, with slow archness, and pushing one of the wafers towards the edge of the plate, as if this were the particular one, and not any of the others, which she wished Zellie to take. "It's easy to see what a man thinks; and there are some men who fancy one doesn't know what's in their thoughts, but they're mistaken. I guessed it all along by Freddy's voice and by his eyes when he imagined nobody was watching him: but then I was cross with him because he didn't speak his mind"—and was it part of the prescription for the use of the balm that Violet should keep her eyes on the ground so as not to perceive Zellie blushing?

"Then I couldn't bear to see you miserable," added Violet. "If a man made you unhappy ever so little, I would speak as crossly of him as I could, because he would deserve it."

"I couldn't bear to see you—irritated," replied Zellie, rather tremulously, in a voice as low as her sister's. "All that Fred—Lord Mayrose said was so noble that it seemed hard-hearted of you. Even papa was touched."

"Yes; but a man should not know only how to speak to Lords, he should be able to speak to *us*—that's what I was saying to myself. But I expect he's afraid."

"Afraid of what?" asked Zellie, naïvely.

"Well, afraid of money. There is always something of that sort to make everyone wretched. It seems we are rich and he is not—that may frighten him—men are so odd? Then it may be Lord Hornette—"

"Lord Hornette!" ejaculated Zellie, with an inflection of mingled dread and dislike.

"You know, dear, he was always showing himself polite to you before Freddy came back, and people may have talked about it," observed Violet, wisely.

"But I never made Lord Hornette any promises, Violet—never?"

"Supposing, though, Zellie—supposing Lord Hornette asked you for a—promise?"

"Oh, Violet! I could never make him a promise—not if, if I died for it! Never!" And there must

have been vehement emphasis in this answer, for Violet who had risen, was on her knees again in an instant, making Zellie a necklace with her arms, and whispering, "But, then, Zellie, we have only to wait a little and everything will come right. Freddy will take heart and speak—men always speak after they have behaved aggravatingly for a time. And promise never to think I am teasing you, eh? Try and be like you were before all this—before that day with the hounds."

"I thought he was killed when he fell from his horse," was Zellie's scarcely audible answer—inaudible because Violet's lips crept up to hers as she made it.

It was this confidential moment which Miss Stitchett, the maid, selected for scratching at the door and remarking that it was time for their ladyships to dress. The day was waning in the square outside; the lampmen were dotting their red-stars about Belgravia; and in Zellie's room the flicker of the fire threw fitful shadows over the group of the two sisters nestling cheek to cheek. They would have both loved to nestle so for a time longer, but at the maid's intrusion Violet rose, and stretched her arms above her head, with a well-feigned little yawn of laziness and languor; then stooping to breathe another parting whisper of good hope, she sought her own room and surrendered herself to Miss Stitchett's comb and ivory-backed brushes.

But whilst inventing arguments to plead in favour of Mayrose, Violet had ended by convincing herself—

a phenomenon of which lawyers may have some experience. So long as she had judged Mayrose on her own account, she had heaped up accusations against him, taxing him with callousness of a rare order for not requiting the love that was being lavished on him; but in taking his part for Zellie's sake it had occurred to her that money and Lord Hornette—the two somehow joined—might indeed be the causes of his reserve.

All this she pondered while Miss Stitchett was making her beautiful for Bumblebeigh House, with a coiffure copied from a diagram by that great capillary artist, Mr. Frisemêche, of Paris, and with a dress trimmed with rows and little bunches of those blue iridescent feathers taken from the throats of peacocks—a dazzling conception of that other great Parisian, Mr. Girth. Still when she was ready for conquest, and was fastening on the pearl ornaments which by Mr. Girth's written orders were to be worn "profusely," Violet could not help exclaiming—

"After all, though, Freddy is very provoking and silly. Papa and mamma love him—I love him—everybody loves him. He has only to come and say that he loves Zellie and we should all be happy, everyone of us."

And this prudent little schemer resolved that whenever she met Freddy, whether at Bumblebeigh House that night, or elsewhere, she would give him an adroit hint.

CHAPTER XX.

The "Muffin Bell."

VIOLET did see Mayrose at Bumblebeigh House that evening in the rout that followed the Duke's private dinner-party, but the crush of notables was so great that she could not get near him. London had poured out its place-hunting legions who thronged his Grace's yellow drawing-rooms to smirk before the wives, daughters, and sisters of all the new Cabinet Ministers: and Mayrose having been borne into a corner by the tide remained there like a stranded waif, half-a-dozen of the Drone, Rodent-Midge, and Keane-Forester ladies treating him like lawful jetsam, and pulling him figuratively to pieces. It was several days before Violet fairly saw Mayrose again to speak to, and by that time he had added a cubit to his stature. He was gazetted Under-Secretary for the Australian Colonies; and moreover he was somebody, which an Under-Secretary need not necessarily be. The weekly papers, following in the train of the dailies, had caught up his speech and analysed it as a remarkable—some said threatening—production, the political programme of a new party; and hereat such of the dailies as were antagonistic to Mr. Paramount,

and felt disgusted at having bestowed praise on somebody who turned out to have a programme, wrote new leaders recanting their previous ones, and sneered at the speech, warning the orator against bumptiousness. This was no mean triumph. But perhaps the most satisfactory tribute was that of a high-class review, which in the houghty-toity style of philosophy familiar to its readers speculated on the functions of peers in the abstract and on their utility in general. The writer deplored the position of a young peer of *νοῦς*, and the sense of wasted *δύναμις* which must oppress him at finding himself in a gerusian assembly, fated by the conditions of its essence to be abortive, bringing forth *magno jam conatu magnas nugas*. All this high-class writing filled a column, and was by the Rev. Nonus Nines.

So Mayrose was a public servant. He drew a salary of fifteen hundred a year, had patronage to dispose of, and ruled Australia under the guidance of Lord Balbie Drone—so nick-named from a slight impediment in his speech, which enabled him to say but one half of what he desired, and therefore lent an air of preternatural sapience to the half that was left unsaid. These unsaid halves had been the making of Lord Balbie Drone. Judging him by his countenance, one was moved to credit him with a depth of purpose unfathomable, for it might be truly said of him as of a certain Chancellor that nobody was ever so wise as Lord Balbie looked. He came to the office every morning with a long umbrella under his arm, and read

the "Times;" when he had done that he read some other paper. The cutting of the leaves of a Blue-book would bring him to the hour when he generally took a brown-bread biscuit and a glass of sherry, after which he was sufficiently refreshed to vouchsafe as many signatures as the Permanent Under-Secretary, Mr. Keane-Midge, requested of him. A gentleman of meek, polished urbanity, he gave Mayrose no trouble of any sort, and was glad—almost grateful—when the latter would come in to help him eat the brown-bread biscuits, and agree with him that sherry was not what it used to be in former years. Towards three, with the consciousness of duty discharged sitting comfortably on him, his lordship would set out for the House of Commons on foot, going the longest way because he made it a principle to take exercise, and, on another principle, he contrived to leave the House early, and never to return to it unless absolutely wanted, because he doubted whether night air was good for the lungs. Lord Balbie's hat was not well brushed, nor did his boots fit him, but there was a knowingly politic aspect on them which singled them out from the hats and boots of the vulgar.

Now it was at Lord Balbie's house that Violet met Mayrose again, for the Duke of Bumblebeigh's brother had married a rich heiress of one of the governing houses—the Lady Isabella Keane-Rodent, and her ladyship was hospitable in bringing useful and pleasant people together. Mayrose had been speedily invited there, and it had required him no time to see

that he stood in Lady Bella's eyes as a favoured subaltern does towards the wife of his colonel. Lady Bella loved to patronise young men, to draw them out, show them and give them advice. She was always richly covered—it could scarcely be styled “dressing,” for she was of luxuriant proportions, and a little amiss in her taste for colours; she was also humorously bluff, and the clubs called her Belladonna, not because of the beauty she may have once claimed, but because of her conversation, which, like Belladonna, was apt to make the pupils of one's eyes dilate.

“So you are in the office now,” she said to Mayrose, after the latter had fared sumptuously at her board, and was standing before her in the drawing-room during the few minutes that precede the incursion of later guests invited to the “assembly.” “You have an excellent place. I knew poor Sir Job Humdrombe, who held it years ago, before I was married; his wife ran away with her footman.”

“Dear me!” said Mayrose with sympathy.

“Yes, it's a painful subject, and I never allude to it; but those Humdrombes have always been unfortunate. There was Mr. Dulleigh-Humdrombe, who became Lord Tweedledee, and people always said he got his peerage to console him for his wife having gone off to Nice with Count Vaudeville of the French Embassy. He threatened to poison himself.”

“I hope he thought better of it.”

“Yes, his valet tied him up with the bed-curtains

and cried for the police, so that it very nearly got into the papers. These things are all good to know, but not to be talked about; in fact I often wonder myself how it is that scandals get circulated and remembered as they do. But now tell me," broke off Lady Bella, with a sigh, "you have half the patronage of the office to dispose of?"

"A part of it, I believe. Lord Albert has been kind enough to hand me over some of the appointments."

"Oh, it's the custom, and there's no kindness in it," exclaimed her ladyship, frankly. "Is there not a judgeship in the Groggsome Islands vacant now?"

"Yes, and five dozen applicants for it. I was reading the testimonials before dinner," laughed the new Under-Secretary.

"Dear me! I wouldn't read testimonials if I were you," exclaimed Lady Belladonna. "If you have not yet appointed anybody, I will tell you of a capital person; he is a relative of mine, so I can depend upon him—young Staulker Rodent, who has been at the Bar some years. He took the highest honours at Oxford,—what they call a pass-degree."

"I shall be very happy to recommend Mr. Rodent," bowed Mayrose, a little bewildered: and just as his first piece of patronage had thus been whipped skillfully beyond reach of the five score of gentlemen who had sent in testimonials, the assembly guests began to flow in. This enabled Mayrose to retreat and accost his chief, who introduced him to various people

presumably belonging to the testimonial order of creation, for they talked of the Australian Archipelago as if they all wanted to be sent there by the next boat, and as if Mayrose would oblige them particularly in assisting their embarkation. Not much diverted by all this, the Under-Secretary meditated whether he could not glide away unobserved and go home to deal with some business of the office which to his inexperienced mind seemed to require special attention, and he had reached an outer room on his way to exit when he felt the tap of a fan on his arm, and turning round was confronted by Violet—all silk, flowers, and golden tresses.

“I suppose you have become too proud to talk to any one now,” said she with a pout, “you passed Zellie and me without even looking at us.”

“I could look at you for a long time now without tiring.”

“Your eyes are complimentary there’s no denying—What do you think of my dress? Don’t be too candid, please say it’s delightful, and that will do—But are you not working? I thought Under Secs. worked all the day and night?”

“I shall work to-morrow, next day, and the night after. How is Zellie?”

“Zellie is very well. You would not have occasion to ask if you came to see us more often.”

“I have been to see Lady Rosemary twice this week.”

“Yes, when Zellie and I were out.”

"I wished both times you had been in."

"Oh, a man is always wishing things which cost him no trouble," replied Violet, severely, as she beat down her coruscating skirt; but now they had reached the confines of the drawing-room, where a distinguished vocalist with a butter-coloured head had been invited, at its own ill-concealed desire, to sit down at the piano and sing British ballads. The room was hushed, and Mayrose led Violet in silence to a seat whilst the gifted being poured out his warble.

Everybody was serious, not to say sad. Mayrose could not discover Zellie because she was concealed from him by numbers of the sad people in large chignons, sitting down, and by others, still sadder, in dress coats, standing up. So he reverted to Violet, who was examining him out of the corners of her eyes as if she had some just cause to be offended with him. Not guessing what passed in her mind, Mayrose was amused at her serious face; a recollection of old days, when she used to quarrel with him, and play sulks all an afternoon if he pored over his books instead of going out with her to fish.

"What a wilful little thing you are, Violet," he stooped and whispered during a pause in the ballad. "Just fancy being offended with me because I didn't know when you would be out!"

"You know we always ride in the park from twelve till two," responded Violet.

"From twelve till two?"

"Yes, papa goes with us when he can, and when

he can't we ride alone with the groom—Zellie and I. Do you ride?" added she, demurely.

"I have no hack for the present," said Mayrose, reflecting of a sudden how much a saddle-horse might add to the comfort of life.

"Well, if you bought a horse and rode into the park with it, I should always be glad to see you, and perhaps Zellie would too."

These last words were low uttered, and were half drowned in the noise of the butter-coloured tenor; but Mayrose heard them and they melted in his heart.

In the general disturbance that followed the close of the ballad—people leaving their places and forming new groups—Mayrose shifted his position and caught sight of Zellie, but Lord Hornette was with her. He stood behind the sofa where she sat, and it struck Mayrose that she appeared in gay spirits. Her lips moved to answer everything the Earl said; she even smiled, and there was nothing to show—so far as Mayrose could see—that she was listening to the compliments of a man whom she disliked. Mayrose had got apart from Violet, for Lord Chevy Chase and a cohort of Guardsmen had come to flit round her, and he stood a moment uncertain whether he should go away, or approach Zellie under cover of Lord Hornette's presence, and pay her the civility of a greeting. It might look churlish if he did not, for she might catch sight of his retreating figure. He thought he would go up to her.

But he was still deliberating, when there suddenly broke upon the scene the agitated features of Dolly Drone. This burly personage had evidently been thrown into commotion by something startling, for he made straight towards his brother, ploughing himself a channel through the crowd with a promptitude which nothing but the habit of society prevented from resembling a hustle; then he touched Lord Hornette on the arm, and said a few words in his ear. The Earl started, questioned his brother with a frown, then bowed hurriedly to Zellie, and vanished into another room with Dolly; but the two reappeared in an instant, the elder brother with an ugly expression and biting his lips, the other labouring behind like a brig in distress. Right towards Mayrose they came, not seeming to perceive him in their haste to reach the door; but as they were about to brush by, Lord Hornette looked up, and his features rapidly cleared:—

"Ah, Mayrose, it's just you we were going to look for! It's most lucky you're here. Do come along with us, please; something very unpleasant has happened."

"What is it?" asked Mayrose, astonished, as he allowed himself to be led by Lord Hornette into the tea-room. Here they surprised the vocalist with the butter-coloured head rewarding himself for his late efforts with a cup of coffee. He appeared to think that this deputation of noblemen had come to congratulate him, but discovering his error just as he was

preparing to smile, he slunk away as if he had been caught singing out of tune.

"Look here, read this!" exclaimed the Earl, taking a newspaper from his brother, and tearing it open. "Wasn't I right to tell you how people talk about the slightest thing? It's most awkward and insolent—see here;" and he handed Mayrose the sheet, scoring a paragraph with his glove.

It was a late edition of the "Muffin Bell," a London evening paper of repute, and Mayrose read this:—

"MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE.—*Our Hiveborough Correspondent telegraphs that a match has been arranged between Viscount Mayrose, the new Under-Secretary for Australia, and Lady Azalea Carol, eldest daughter of the Earl of Rosemary, K.G., Lord Keeper.*"

It would have been difficult to say what Mayrose felt as he scanned these lines. Certain it is that his pulses throbbed quick, and that his face twice changed colour, before Lord Hornette's dry, irritated voice jarred on him, crying: "You see if it's not stopped in time the paragraph will be reprinted in all to-morrow's morning papers. But it's only eleven, and I'm sure you won't mind going the round of the newspaper offices and to the Press agencies to give this thing a flat denial. We'll go with you, but you are the only man who can speak authoritatively in the affair."

"The only man," echoed Dolly Drone, panting.

CHAPTER XXI.

A Contradiction.

IF this newspaper paragraph had appeared but a few days later! If Mayrose could have met Zellie and Violet but once alone in the park, or if that evening at Lady Belladonna's he had talked but half as long with Zellie as he had done with Violet, there would have been no need for him then to have obeyed Lord Hornette. One word from Zellie, one unmistakable glance would have given him heart to speak out, and if Zellie had but smiled in listening to him, there would have been an end of all perplexities, so that he might have said to Lord Hornette, "Let the paragraph stand." The Earl would have quarrelled with him, of course; but, after all, the happiness of his life and that of Zellie were of more account to him than Lord Hornette's good pleasure. As it was, nothing had occurred between Zellie and himself to alter the position of which Lord Hornette had taken advantage at Elmwood. Lady Rosemary had said nothing which could make Mayrose suppose that Hornette had been guilty of misrepresentation; Zellie's manner in the House of Lords could by no means be construed into anything more than an indication of friendly admira-

tion and goodwill—had he not seen her that very night chatting most amicably with Hornette?—and, in sum, he was still bound by the solemn promise he had given to the Earl. Besides, the contradiction of the paragraph was not a thing that could be postponed until Mayrose had time to feel his ground anew. Even as he stood in that tea-room fingering the newspaper confusedly, the compositors of the morning journals might be setting up the announcement in type, and every moment lost was of the utmost importance from the rightful suitor's point of view.

"You see the false news will be repeated all over the country to-morrow if we hesitate," repeated the Earl, impatiently and with a testy gesture, as he watched Mayrose's blank face.

"Yes, I will come with you," said Mayrose, waking up, and they went downstairs together, out among the servants and linkmen, and the flare of carriage lamps on the pavement. Mayrose's brougham was called; Lord Hornette sprang into it, but as Dolly Drone was going to do the same his brother stopped him, "Suppose you go off to the Palæstra, Doll, and hunt up Nines. He's thick with all the papers, and you two can go to three of the offices whilst we call at the others," and the Earl hurriedly mentioned the newspapers which he and Mayrose would visit.

Accordingly, Dolly Drone drove off obediently to that stronghold of literary Philistinism the Palæstra Club, to disturb the Rev. Nonus Nines, while Mayrose and his companion sped away eastward as fast as

clashing wheels could carry them. They crossed cabs jolting home with their family freights from the play-houses; men with the collars of their greatcoats up, striding quickly to their lodgings and letting themselves in stealthily with latchkeys; policemen putting their lanterns to keyholes and trying to see that doors and area-gates were safe locked. They passed clubs with their blinds down and huge shadows of men reading colossal newspapers, and maybe conning over that very insertion about the "marriage in high life;" and so on out of Belgravia into Whitehall, and eastwards down the Strand towards the quarters where journalism holds its assizes.

At any other time it might have amused them both to brush their way up the wooden staircases of these offices and see Literature measuring out her sermons by the column of eight words to the line. The printer's devils with faces besmudged; the reporters hugging "flimsy" against their threadbare bosoms; the husky gentlemen who have hurried with the first news of murders just committed, conflagrations raging, or burglaries unpublished; those owl-like birds of night the critics, whose dress-coat tails bulge agape with notes on that evening's new drama; the small fry who indite paragraphs, the bigger fry who pen leaders, and the editors, chief or sub, whose task it is to reduce this mass of phrasing into palatable pulp—all these persons are worth a midnight's visit, and might afford themes for study to men fresh from the echoes of women's prattle or of drawing-room

tenors' minstrelsy. But if Mayrose and Lord Hornette had been old in their experience of the fourth estate, they could not have shown more indifference to the sights which met them. Reaching the seedy but illustrious mansion where one of the most potent of the papers put its oracular beliefs into print, they alighted at the same time as a gentleman from a hansom, presumably one of the oracular staff, who vanished through the door with his head averted, as if detection would be most grievous to him. They followed this gentleman through the door and handed their cards to a man in shirt-sleeves and a paper cap, who had some crumbs of cheese on his lips, and scrambled up a staircase, leaving them in a draught. Literature is ever queerly housed and has strange attendants.

But the cards of a peer and a noble M.P.—the one a member of the Government, the other a future Duke of Bumblebeigh—commanded attention even from an Editor, to whom the great of the earth were as ninepins. Lord Mayrose might have come from Downing Street with special information about that war in the Cocoa county, and he could not be left in a draught. The man in the paper cap shambled down, and begged their lordships to step up; and they stepped up into the room where the Editor—enthroned behind piles of letters, litters of telegrams, manuscripts in every illegible variety and on every species of onion-peel foreign paper—sat correcting the proof of a leader. He was a notable personage this

—the man who, better than any historian past or present, could have written the truth about the age in which he lived, and the man who of all others would have been least tempted to write it. The knowledge he had acquired of this world's affairs would have been enough to muddle most men, but it had not muddled *him*; he appeared to see clear through it all, and to have reached the pacifying impression that to-day is as yesterday, and the newest events like old stories which Time delights to tell over and over again, like a feeble person in his dotage. Dignified but humorous in mien, of manners polite and ministerial, this diplomatist of the Quill wore a benevolent look which seemed to say that you need not be afraid of unbosoming yourself to him, for that whatever might be your communication he had heard worse before. Lord Hornette, who knew the famous Editor from having dined with him at Bumblebeigh House, shook his hand and accosted him with a deference he would have shown to no other Englishman—much less Irishman—not being a Royal Prince.

The matter that had brought the two noblemen was soon explained and a contradiction promised. There was a discussion as to whether the term "*incorrect*" or "*utterly unfounded*" should be used. Lord Hornette being for the more vigorous phrase and Mayrose for the milder. Naturally the milder was adopted, because for the lady's sake the denial of a marriage rumour must always be so worded as to convey no idea of irritation. When the Editor had

written the required paragraph and promised it should be inserted in conspicuous type, he expressed a polite blame for the levity of those newspapers which harass noble families by premature nuptial announcements, and his visitors left him with thanks to continue their rounds.

There was not an office they left unvisited, for it occurred to the Earl that if Dolly Drone had been unable to lay hands on the Rev. Nonus Nines he might not possess initiative enough to act on his own responsibility, wherefore all the small hours were spent by them in affronting draughts, sending up cards, and furnishing explanations. They saw an editor whose face was like an open daisy, and another in tight clothes who chirruped round them like an obsequious sparrow, wonderfully flattered by their noble company. A third editor in slippers had a harried look, as if he feared that in a leader just then printing he had allowed a contributor to go too far; and a fourth, with red cheek-bones, whose editorial sanctum smelt of smoke, looked game for anything. The clocks of St. Clement Dane's and St. Mary-le-Strand were drowsily chiming the third hour past midnight, and the carts of fruit and vegetables were lumbering down the Strand towards Covent Garden, when Mayrose and Hornette came out of the last morning paper office, and met on the threshold Dolly Drone and Mr. Nines, who were just going in. Dolly Drone had not found the reverend writer at the Palæstra, but had awoken him from the sleep of the just in his

chambers, and had claimed of him as a friendly service to put on his trousers and come out into the cold. Then the two had gone together to the press agencies to get the contradiction circulated among the provincial journals; after which, it being Thursday night, they had proceeded to the printing-offices of the illustrated papers published on Friday, and had luckily succeeded in their mission.

"We were not a minute too soon, though," observed Mr. Nines, who looked dissipated from having been hurried out before he had brushed his hair; "the papers were going to press, and had the quotation as a titbit among their latest news. They put on such spurts to outdo each other that I expected to find your portrait, Mayrose, and Lady Azalea's already on the blocks."

"It's a sheer madness this for printing impertinent remarks about one's private doings," cried Lord Hornette, with the voice of a steel-trap uncoiled. "We'll leave it to you, Nines, to trounce the d—d fellow who first put this lie into print—tell him he ought to be punished, he and his correspondent at Hiveborough. Confound the man!"

There was nothing more to be done now that the mischief which Lord Hornette feared had been averted. The Earl suggested that the whole party should turn into a club and try and get some supper; but Mayrose declined, and rode home alone, though not to bed.

Letting himself in with his key, he ascended the

staircase of his big, silent house, and knowing his valet Bino would be asleep long ere this—having orders not to sit up for his master after midnight—he did not go towards his bed-chamber, but into a large state drawing-room that occupied all the first floor. It was a strange place to haunt in these dark hours, but to a sleepless man imbued with a Continental love for open air, the long balcony skirting the five windows might seem a good place to lounge on, smoking away melancholy in a waking dream. There would be nothing unusual in a man spending a night in a Parisian balcony, and something might even be made out of the poetry of the proceeding, but it would seem as if poetical acts perpetrated in a city of coal-smoke (though for that matter Paris is smoky enough, too) lost much of their ideality and even of their good sense. Mayrose, though, cared little for that, and was more concerned about the bleak, ghostly look which his state apartment wore. The small candlestick he had lit at the night-lamp in the hall threw a pale flicker on the dull array of chairs and sofas in their holland covers, on the tall mirrors that reflected the flickering in the form of yellow flashes, on the pictures of departed Mayroses—the men red-coated and wigged for the most part, the women tricked out in white satin, with pointed bodices, and holding small nosegays of chlorotic flowers in their taper fingers. They seemed good bodies as they simpered in the candle-light at the room where they themselves had been simpered to and courted during

the hey-day of the Mayrose annals; and their descendant could not help wondering whether they, too, had ever been crossed in their love affairs as he had; and if so, why they wore such unconscionably placid faces after it? He softly drew up a blind, and opened one of the windows, letting the moonlight stream in above his head with a gust of cool air that chafed his temples gratefully; then, stepping on to the balcony, he lit a cigar, and leaned on the railing, feeling like a man who has played his first rubber in the game of life and lost it.

And there would be no retrieving the loss either. Whether it was a fatality that had separated him from Zellie, a misunderstanding or what not, the papers would be spreading it in a few hours among Englishmen all the world over, that Zellie was never to be his wife. Had he acted well or weakly in keeping faith with Hornette? The question was past discussing now. The thing was done, and Zellie and he stood wider apart than if one of them were dead. He gazed wistfully into the deserted square below him, with its leafless trees unstirred by a breath of wind, and its houses around all hushed; and he conjured up a last vision of what might have been and what was—the vision of Zellie animating that cheerless room behind him, gladdening the old chambers and passages with the music of her voice and the light sound of her footfalls, and making of the wifeless, childless, lifeless house a bright home again. It was a fair idyll that had grown up unawares and

must be dispelled now for ever, like other dreams that vanish unremembered. And yet not unremembered, for the earth keeps a trace of the flower that has been plucked up, and so does the heart. As the first grey streak of dawn was breaking over the roofs facing him to the east, Mayrose turned westward in the direction where Zellie must be sleeping and blew a kiss—"God bless you, darling, and may you be happy!"

CHAPTER XXII.

Remedia Amoris.

WHEN a man has been unfortunate in a love affair, the circumstance has some ludicrous aspects, apart from the keener misery endured. He must contrive to avoid meeting the late object of his affections; and one never discovers how small the world is until one tries to avoid meeting somebody in it. Nothing but a long trip abroad will quite answer the purpose, and the unwritten laws of Society do, indeed, prescribe that a rejected lover shall take himself out of the way until the lady he failed to win has been married to his rival. He may wait for the tidings of this interesting event in continental hotels. The London papers will reach him in the morning or the evening, as the case may be; and his anxiety to procure them as soon as they are due will make him a valuable critic on the irregularities of the foreign postal services. The public may not be aware how much they are indebted for the safe transmission of their letters and papers to exiled lovers, who write to the *Times* from Paris, Rome, Cairo, to complain of postal delays that are worrying them, and to suggest reforms. Some of them are good enough to compile

statistical tables recording the exact hours at which their papers reached them on thirty successive days of the month; and in countries where the authorities vary the occasional tardiness of delivery by confiscating the papers altogether, the lover is apt to grow warm with a sudden zeal for the free institutions he has left behind him. When the printed news of the marriage at last arrives it may come as a welcome relief, or the lover may think it has reached him too soon after all; but, in either case, he must pray against the crowning trial that may befall an exile—that of having the honeymoon of the couple from whom he has fled intruded abruptly upon him in the place of his concealment. A lover, strolling moodily down the staircase of a far-off hotel, has before now come upon a muffled pair ascending behind alacritous waiters and chamber-maids, and followed by a company of porters groaning under British luggage. He has stood aside to let the group pass, and has seen—what? Happily this acute pang acts as a signal that his quarantine is at an end, and that the ports of England are once more open to him.

Unluckily for Mayrose he could not fly to the Continent and roam there till Zellie and Lord Hornette were married, for he had to help govern Australia. During a few days he was sorely tempted to fling that favoured colony far from him, and to start off, like the man in “Locksley Hall,” and set up in a wigwam with a squaw to rear his dusky race. He began to know the petty misery of shrinking from dining out

or going to parties lest he should encounter Zellie and arouse Lord Hornette's suspicions anew; but on the other hand, his official position debarred him from leading the life of a hermit. He was wanted and courted. Cards encumbered his breakfast-table every morning, verbal invitations were pressed on him, and, to make the situation more intricate, many of these invitations came from members of the house of Drone, among whom he was much thrown, owing to his connection with Lord Balbie, and by whom he could not but feel that he was being treated with great cordiality and kindness. This uncomfortable *imbroglio* lasted a week or more, and then Mayrose learned that Lord Hornette was continuing to woo Zellie, and would probably be soon accepted. The announcement was first made to him in a friendly manner, not devoid of tact, by Lord Hornette himself, and Mayrose was so far calmed by it that he resolved, as many another man has done before him, to find solace for his disappointment in work—hard, ceaseless work. As the wigwam idea was scarcely feasible, he would go out on to the war-path against abuses in yonder Australia Office, where abuses were plentiful so far as he could see, and had needed looking to for years. This was a brave scheme, truly; but here again Mayrose's love-entanglement was disastrous, for it obliged him to keep aloof from Rosemary House at a time when the Countess's advice was almost indispensable to him. Inexperienced as he was in official ways, new to Society, and not yet conscious

that a man can be over-rash in well doing, he required to be told who were the people he must be wary of offending, and above all to be cautious as to how he started on such an adventurous expedition as abuse-hunting—for abuses are not to be tilted at, egad! one must circumvent them. There have been men who went out into the abuse-field armed with a scythe, and thought they did fine work because they strewed the ground with a litter of chopped things; but this was of no more use than if they had mown away the tufts of so many carrots, leaving the root and body of the vegetables safe under earth. Deeply imbedded as an acacia-tree, and with roots as strong and wide-spreading, is the official abuse, so that a man who extirpates but one in a life-time may close his eyes and say "*Plaudite.*" From ignorance of all this, Mayrose set out to master the Australia Office with no less fire than Quixote did to fell the wind-mills, and he speedily came into collision with Mr. Keane-Midge, the Permanent Under-Secretary.

"Good morning," said that valued public servant, as Mayrose arrived on the stroke of ten one day, and sat down to his desk in a well-warmed room that overlooked St. James's Park. Mr. Keane-Midge, who was sixty years old or thereabouts, had come in with some blue papers, and looked unutterably venerable as he fingered these treasures. "Good morning!" he smiled. "I have worked with many of your predecessors, but never saw one who set such an example of punctuality to our clerks."

"I am not more punctual than yourself, Mr. Midge," said Mayrose, civilly, as he held out a hand for the papers. "The fact is, I find there is so much work that one would need all the night as well as the day to get through it."

"There is a great deal of work," assented Mr. Keane-Midge. "I wonder now how some of your predecessors got through it, for they toiled less than you do."

"Perhaps they were like that Frenchman who put all his letters unopened in a box and read them at the end of the year. He generally found that the matters of which they treated had got settled very well without his assistance."

"A new idea," observed Mr. Keane-Midge, thoughtfully, as if he were ready to claim that Frenchman as a brother. "I think two-thirds of the correspondence of our office might be dealt with in that way."

"Somebody here seems to have thought so too, judging by this Coccoanib business. I have to answer questions on the war in the House of Lords this afternoon, and it appears to me the whole expedition could have been avoided by a timely letter to the black King."

"The matter concerned the African Office more than ourselves," answered Mr. Keane-Midge. "I shall always lay the blame of that expedition on my relative Mr. Drone-Midge of the other department; though it's true that a correspondence with negroes is taxing

and unprofitable. But that reminds me that you have not yet appointed a private Secretary?" and the Permanent Mr. Midge raised his ancient eyebrows.

"Does talking of negroes remind you of Secretaries?" smiled Mayrose. "I have been employing one of the men downstairs up to the present, but I expect a Secretary this very day."

"May I ask if he belongs to the office?" inquired Mr. Keane-Midge, in the tone of one who could have suggested a candidate of his own for this post of four hundred a year. It was one of the qualities of Mr. Keane-Midge that when a remunerative post was vacant he could always name a candidate for it.

"No, he is a second-class clerk in the Waste Paper Office; and I shall probably ask for his transfer to this department in the same capacity," replied Mayrose, glancing at the clock. "He is a cousin of mine, and ought to have been here by this time. I appointed ten o'clock."

"Oh!" said the venerable Mr. Keane-Midge, bending his head, and without conveying anything in his intonation but a wish to live on perfect terms with this transferable clerk, intruder though he were; and thereon he rose, leaving the blue papers on the table. "I had better quit you for the present, perhaps. If you require any further facts in preparing your answer about King Coccoanib, I shall be happy to furnish them. But I would abide by this point, that we are not prepared to give explanations of a detailed cha-

racter; that will be the pith of Lord Albert's answer in the Commons."

"A pithy answer, too," remarked Mayrose; "but before you go, Mr. Midge, would you mind giving me one word of information on the business of the office, which seems to me to be conducted in a manner wholly unintelligible? I wished to confer with Lord Albert about it. I find clerks who have been employed here fifteen years, and who do all the work, whilst others who are new and three times as well paid do nothing; the latter are entitled to a pension after ten years, the former get no pension if they serve twenty. How's that?"

"It's an old practice of the office," said Mr. Midge, like one who alludes to an interesting relic of great antiquity: "the clerks you mean are supernumeraries, only employed for temporary work."

"Temporary work, though, when it lasts fifteen and twenty years, looks to me much like permanency! What is a temporary clerk to do with himself if you turn him out without compensation after he has wasted all his manhood in the office? But again, why take in supernumeraries when you have such a large staff of permanent clerks all idling?"

"It's an old practice of this, and other offices to confine each set of clerks to their special duties. It has never been considered expedient to occupy the superior and better paid clerks with mere copying work."

"I could understand that if you gave them some

occupation of a higher order; but see here, I had to deal yesterday with a business which was submitted to my predecessor, and I have had the curiosity to follow the windings of it. A letter was sent to this office nine months ago by a person who wanted to find out something about the land-grants in the Kangaroo Colony. His letter was opened, stamped, and registered by a clerk at 600*l.* a year, who passed it on to another at 800*l.* by whom it was endorsed with a query, and then referred to my predecessor, who laid it before the late Australian Secretary, by whom it was referred back for answer to a chief clerk at 900*l.* a year. This chief clerk ordered a subordinate at 300*l.* to write to the Governor of Kangaroo; a clerk at 250*l.* copied the letter, one at 150*l.* put it in an envelope and addressed it, and nine months after we get a reply from the Governor giving the information required, but adding that he had gone minutely into this very subject in a despatch forwarded to us two years ago! Now couldn't the clerk at 600*l.* and the one at 800*l.* have managed the whole matter between them by simply referring to the Governor's original despatch, and drafting an answer which the applicant would have received within two days?"

"It is not the practice of the office to return hurried answers," rejoined Mr. Keane-Midge, as though shocked, "nor do I know of a system by which we could any of us be kept conversant with the contents of despatches. We receive too many of them; they fill three large rooms!"

“Well, it seems to be the practice of the office to give everyone as little brain-work as possible,” replied Mayrose; “but suppose you and I lay our heads together, Mr. Midge, and try to simplify old practices? There are several other matters on which I may have to ask your assistance, and I make no doubt Lord Albert would agree to any sensible proposals. For the present, I will just look through these papers and qualify myself to tell the House of Lords that we have no explanations to give them.”

And with this valediction Mayrose betook himself to the despatches, whilst Mr. Keane-Midge retired, with wisdom and quiet affability radiating from his whole person, so that they must have warmed the very soldiers parading in the Mall under the windows.

But for all this, the Permanent Mr. Keane-Midge was not delighted at the above dialogue, and still less so at Mayrose's purpose of introducing a cousinly clerk from another office into a confidential post. When a disturbance is threatened in a State department, it is well that the breaker of the peace—that is, the innovator, abuse-reformer, or dignify him by what euphemism you will—should be made to feel that he stands like an Ishmael in the office, with no cousin by his side, but with every man's hand against him. In this way he is brought to his senses the faster. Mr. Keane-Midge could detect the signs of a disturbance long before they were visible to other eyes, and it was a very short study of Mayrose which had convinced

him that here was a young man now who was going to make himself as pleasant as the hedge-hog did when he was invited into the snug place where the toads were. Properly, there should have been no disturbance possible, because there should have been no conflict of attributes between the two Under-Secretaries, Parliamentary and Permanent; but where the nominal head of a department loves brown-bread biscuits more than administrative details, the pair of subalterns are apt to clash together for mastery. So from the day when Mr. Keane-Midge had seen Mayrose come to the office and betray a determination either to be guided by Lord Balbie or to guide him, but on no account to be dictated to by Mr. Keane-Midge, this Permanent and irresponsible gentleman had foreseen that trials were at hand. He might prevail, or he might be worsted and submit with good grace, as he had done when worsted on other occasions; but anyway he would make a fight of it, and therefore he would gladly have strengthened himself by recommending to Mayrose a Secretary of his own choosing—one who could be depended on. There is much in the influence of a Private Secretary. A nominee of Mr. Keane-Midge's, carefully selected from among the pet clerks of the establishment, would have initiated Mayrose into the true spirit of the office, dissuaded him from meddling, or at worst have kept Mr. Midge informed of what things were brewing against his weal. This is why the Permanent Under-Secretary might have been heard murmuring as he withdrew to his

own desk and pigeon-holes, "I was not aware he had cousins! Who can that cousin be?"

Shortly afterwards a messenger brought in a card to Mayrose with the name, "Quilpin Leech, Tabboo Club."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A Piece of Nepotism.

MR. QUILPIN LEECH was Mayrose's cousin on the maternal side. By referring to the extract from the "Peerage" quoted in the first chapter of this tale, it will be seen that Mayrose's father had married "Emily, sixth daughter of Sir Richard Leech, of Hampstead, late Commissioner at Bagpore." Of the other five daughters and of the six sons of Sir Richard, the "Peerage" makes no mention; but they were a fruitful race, whose seed covered the earth, and principally the county of Middlesex, and who established thriving branches of their dynasty at Fulham as well as Hampstead. But one must not confound the Fulham Leeches with the Hampstead Leeches. At the time when Mayrose's father was nearly ruined, the Fulham Leeches, who were connected with the City, and had riverine villas, declared it was scandalous on his part—most inconsiderate and dishonourable; the Hampstead Leeches concluded the wretched peer had not ruined himself on purpose, and pitied him. This led to a schism between the two branches of the dynasty. The Fulham Leeches, who were the more numerous, and had reasons to apprehend that the embarrassed

peer might come to them for loans, ceased visiting in Berkeley Square and at Springfield; the Hampstead Leeches, on the contrary—consisting of Sir Richard's eldest son, his wife, and two maiden sisters, who tenanted the roomy brick house whence Lord Mayrose had married Miss Emily—kept up friendly relations with their noble relative. Now, Quilpin Leech was the seventh son of Sir Richard's eldest born, who lived at Hampstead; and Mayrose had seen something of him and of his sisters—who made a gathering of fourteen in all—during his childhood. Their father was well off, but not rich, for he had inherited the bulk of what Sir Richard had amassed as Commissioner at Bagpore without adding anything to it by his own industry; and the schooling of seven sons blessed with good appetites, to say nothing of seven daughters equally favoured by Heaven, operates drainingly on a man. So Mayrose had no sooner been gazetted to the Under-Secretaryship for Australia than he had received a batch of well-written letters, in which six of the Hampstead sons reminded him of their existence and gave him an account of their capabilities. Likewise, the Fulham Leeches posted him notes of congratulations, and announced themselves all capable and ready to draw Government salaries, for now that all danger of loan-begging was over and that Mayrose seemed likely indeed to make a figure in the world, that unpleasant business of the ruin was generously forgiven and forgotten. Let it be added that Mayrose had not waited for the letters from Hampstead to

remember his mother's kinsfolk. Soon after returning to England he had forwarded them a packing-case full of odds and ends—shawls, Turkish *babouches*, Maltese filigree jewellery, Dieppe ivories, &c., which he had bought on his travels; and immediately after his appointment he had paid an afternoon visit to Hampstead and been regaled with a dinner. The result of that visit was that Mayrose had volunteered to employ Quilpin Leech, the youngest son, as his secretary. He had not seen this youth at Hampstead, but had formed a favourable opinion of him, in the first place because he was the only one of the seven sons who had not written to him, and in the next, because Quilpin had been in the Harrow eleven, and had taken a first-class in mathematics at Oxford. This seemed to justify a little nepotism on his behalf; though hereon it may be observed that nepotism, such as the heedless understand it, is rarely to be met with in this world. A man does not say, "I will appoint a dull relative of mine to a post of emolument simply because he is my kinsman;" but he says, "I will appoint my kinsman because he must needs be a sharp fellow, and because a man is better served by his relatives than by other persons." Like many of us, Mayrose would have severely judged a political opponent who should have created warm berths for his family, but he felt no scruple in offering 400*l.* a year and a responsible station to a cousin whom he scarce knew; for this was a different matter. Nevertheless, having last beheld Quilpin Leech at that period of hobbled-

hoyhood when a boy's trousers are too short for him, he felt a little curious to see what manner of youngster the messenger would now introduce.

"Mr. Quilpin Leech," said the messenger, and admitted a young man of twenty-five, who walked up to Mayrose with a look of gratuitous solemnity, and held out a hand covered with a reddish glove. In a fog it must have looked as if this hand and its fellow had been abnormally frost-bitten and swollen; and Mr. Quilpin extended it in a flabby fashion, as if he wished to get it weighed.

"I am afraid you'll think I'm late," he then began, drawing out a silver watch and turning its face towards Mayrose. "Charles Lamb, though, used to say he could walk from Charing Cross to Temple Bar in no time and gain five minutes. Difference of clocks, you see. My dial says just ten."

"Well, sit down. You would have been welcome at any time," smiled Mayrose, astonished at this exordium. "I think it's a long time since we've met."

"Yes; we rode donkeys over Hampstead Heath," assented Mr. Quilpin, finding a chair and sitting on the edge of it. His face was turned to the light, and appeared to Mayrose not unlike a serious rat's. Nature must have originally intended to arch his small grey eyes with an overhanging brow, then have repented of such a scheme, and drawn the brow right back to the apex of the head like a slope. At this apex there stood up like a crest a rebellious wisp of hair, which would have nothing to say to the parting at the back,

nor be pressed into service for the front parting down the side. It stood there and nodded, giving the head a wide-awake aspect which was heightened by the remarkable volume of Mr. Leech's ears, which stood up straight out, like jug-handles. An expression of rueful gravity completed this prepossessing countenance. Mr. Leech looked as if he had never employed the muscles of his face to laugh with, and as though a smile, had one been coaxed from him, would have hurt him.

"Yes, those were fine donkey rides," said Mayrose, scanning his cousin's features with a sort of wonder, as he might have done the illegible inscription on an Eastern monument—those monuments on which you can read one syllable here and another there, but from which no general sense can be extracted. "You have long outgrown them, though. You came out finely at Oxford and Harrow, and I hear they are very well satisfied with you at the Waste Paper Office; was your work hard there?"

"We-ell fairly so in summer time," answered Quilpin Leech, pensively. "We used to count the 'Times' advertisements in the morning and have 'sweeps' on them. You put the headings of the advertisements—Births, Marriages, Sales, Furnished Lodgings, and all that, in one hat, and the clerks' names in another, and you each subscribe a shilling. The man who draws the 'Furnished Lodgings' generally wins the sweep. Then in the afternoon we do 'Ponto.'—You know what 'Ponto' is?"

"No," replied Mayrose, mystified.

"You take a salad-bowl full of water, and put a champagne cork in it. The thing to do is to fish out the cork with your teeth without spilling any of the water; but this isn't easy, because the cork bobs about and goes to the bottom. Two men back each other to fish out the cork so many times in a minute."

"And I dare say you could back yourself against any man?" said Mayrose, in a puzzled way, and much wishing that his cousin would laugh, for this strange Government clerk spoke as if he were reciting verses of the decalogue.

"No, I was not good at 'Ponto,'" answered Mr. Leech, like one who makes a painful admission. "My strong point was 'Hot-Coal.' You know 'Hot-Coal?'"

"I can't say I do," replied Mayrose.

"Well, you get a saucerful of ice, and keep it in a cool place. When someone of the public comes in to ask something—he must be a nervous-looking man, though—you give him a chair, then pass behind him and play with the fire-tongs a moment, as if you wanted to catch up a coal and light something. Then watch your moment, drop a bit of the ice down the nape of the man's neck, and sing out, 'Halloa! I beg your pardon—that's a hot coal.' As ice imitates burning pretty well, the man stands up and fidgets. You hustle him into another room, make him take off his clothes, embrocate him with a sponge, and send him home in a cab, with a wet towel on his back. A

man can't see down his back, you know, so he thinks it's all right, and thanks you for your kindness."

Mayrose laughed.

"I suppose your object is to let me know that you have nothing to do as yet; so I'll contrive to find you employment. You can write well?"

"I write articles for some of the comic papers, and I believe they make the readers cry."

"I am not alluding to style—I mean handwriting," said Mayrose, not knowing at all how to tackle this kinsman. "Suppose you just sit down here, and I'll dictate something."

"Yes, with pleasure," said Quilpin, as if he had been asked to chant the responses of the burial service; and laying down his hat and umbrella—the latter had a death's-head knob—he took the seat which Mayrose had vacated. Then he removed his red gloves, tried the nib of a steel pen with his thumb, and gave something nearly approaching a dejected wink to intimate that he was ready.

Mayrose dictated to him ten lines of a despatch, and Quilpin's pen careered smoothly over the paper without making a sound. At the tenth line Mayrose said, "That will do;" but the clerk's pen continued to course about in a series of noiseless dashes for half a minute more, and when he handed up his performance, Mayrose bit his lips to avoid laughing outright again. The lines were absolutely like copper-plate—no engraver could have written better; but at the bottom of the page Quilpin had sketched

the presentment of Mr. Keane-Midge, as if that Permanent gentleman had been sitting during hours to him for his portrait. It was a caricature most easy and perfect, but the clerk looked as unconscious as if he had simply dropped a blot at the foot of the writing.

"It seems you know Mr. Keane-Midge?" said Mayrose, glancing at his cousin.

"Well, we Leeches have been sucking for some years at the Consolidated Fund, and we naturally hob-knob with the Rodents and the Midges, who are in the same line of business. But I happen to know old Keane-Midge well, because he gave some of his time to a friend of mine—knocked him down flat."

"I shouldn't have thought Mr. Midge was a man to knock down anybody."

"Not with his fists, he flattened him with paper—I should be glad to speak to you about that case one of these days, supposing you have the power and the inclination to pick up a man who's down—a man with a daughter."

"Do you mean to say Mr. Midge has committed an act of injustice? If so, I should certainly try my power at getting it remedied." And Mayrose's face kindled somewhat.

"I never knew of an injustice committed in a State office," responded Quilpin, wagging his wisp of hair, "but there are mistakes—and this will turn out to have been a mistake, if you have the strength to get it proved such. But you will find it warm work."

"You will make a queer secretary," exclaimed Mayrose, more and more puzzled, "but come and begin your work to-morrow. You can tell me then about your friend." And saying this Mayrose resumed his seat. He little suspected that he had just involved himself in an affair which was to act on his career as the grain of sand on a skater's course—an affair which was to make his life one of strange emotions.

As for Quilpin Leech; being released from his cousin's presence, he stalked lugubriously downstairs and, addressing the porter who swung back the hall door for him, said, "My name's Leech—remember that, and I'm to be one of the ornamental fixtures of this place. If the Prime Minister ever calls to see me, keep him waiting a little in the cold, for I shall have my dignity to maintain." And with this he emerged into Whitehall, and hailed a hansom.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Mr. Quilpin Leech kills the Fatted Calf.

QUILPIN LEECH did not live at Hampstead with his parents and maiden aunts, but had a third-floor lodging in one of those streets which branch out on either side of the Strand like the smaller bones of a fish from the main vertebra. As a clerk in the Waste Paper Office, he had been in the receipt of 300*l.* a year public moneys, and his father had allowed him 100*l.* in excess of this income, which makes a revenue on which some men would have contrived to clothe themselves in fine linen, and eat of the fat of the land. But for reasons which may hereinafter appear, Mr. Quilpin had not lived hitherto like one who was easy in his circumstances, and the fat of the land was known to him only by hearsay.

His cab took him to Charing Cross, but instead of hieing straight to Surrey Street, obeyed the directions of his death's-head umbrella, thrust suddenly through the trap, and paused before a big grocer's, where Quilpin alighted, and presently emerged hugging two bottles of champagne and one of sherry swathed in pink paper, whilst a shopman followed bearing a Yorkshire pie, a Mayence ham (cooked),

and some of the dried fruits of this earth—to wit, figs and raisins. Again the cab moved on, and stopped successively before a confectioner's, where the clerk freighted himself with a pair of roast fowls, a tart, and various biscuits; then before a fishmonger's, where a lobster was procured; after which Mr. Leech bade the driver, in a commanding voice, take him to Covent Garden. Here, under that unique arcade, fragrant with all the flowers of hot-housedom, and with those fruits which are the pampered aristocracy of the vegetable realm, Quilpin disappeared, and he must have been intent on exhausting at one taste all the savours comprised in the fat of the land; for, after leisurely inspecting the shops on both sides of the way, he halted before the showiest of them all. What overgrown mushrooms were here displayed, what pyramids of obese pears at one guinea apiece, what little wooden buckets of strawberries (it was April), and monumental melons, need not be described, enough that Mr. Leech, having bought the wherewith to make a salad, invested gold in the purchase of buckets as above, mandarin oranges, and lady-apples, and this done, set eyes on a row of bouquets perched high in long-necked glass vases, blue and purple.

“Delicious bouquets, sir,” said the maiden who stood in the doorway at the receipt of custom.

“What's the price of that one?” asked Mr. Leech, jerking his hat sideways at the lot.

“That one's a pound, sir,” answered the maiden;

“the most beautiful white lilac and Parma violets you ever saw.”

“No, I’ve seen better,” protested Mr. Leech; “but I mean the one next that,” and this time his hat sloped towards the most gorgeous nosegay on the line. Imagine a fabric about a yard in circumference, and composed of an outer circle of pink rosebuds, then a circle of violets, then white rosebuds, violets again, then white violets, then an inner cluster of more pink rosebuds forming the bull’s-eye to this comely target for men and women’s glances.

“Ah, that one’s a most lovely bouquet, and it’s four guineas, sir,” ejaculated the maiden, climbing on a stool to reach her handiwork. “We send one like it—the same size, I mean—every morning to the Albany for the Earl of Hornette, who is going to be married, I believe, and he sends them to his bride that is to be.”

“I am not engaged to be married, and have no bride that is to be,” said Quilpin gravely; “but I’ll take the bouquet all the same;” and he forthwith paid his money, which amounted to a considerable sum. Then a porter in fustian was summoned to carry the things, and with this man Mr. Leech returned to the cab waiting for him amid that litter of orange peel, cabbage leaves and carrot stumps which would seem to be providently strewn round our chief market by the College of Surgeons, in order that the supply of sprained ankles and broken legs may never run short.

Mr. Leech's shopping, however, was not quite ended, for he wished to provide himself an adjunct to his strawberries in the shape of a pot of Devonshire cream, and this last purchase being effected, he had nothing further on his mind, and arrived without hindrance at the lowermost end of Surrey Street, where his abode lay.

It was a decrepit house, whence by cricking one's neck through an upper window one could descry the Thames and the traffic of bustling penny steamers thereon. Perhaps Dr. Johnson had dined or supped in the parlour with the faded *moiré* curtains, for there is scarcely a house among those adjoining this portion of the Strand but preserves the memory of some eighteenth-century worthy; and then the place may have looked well once, when its blackened bricks were red, when the extinguishers on either side of its doors really served for the torches of linkmen, and when the street, slanting down unwall'd to the river strand, afforded a passage to hooped gentlewomen and wigged critics of Mr. Goldsmith tripping down to be wherried to the Temple Gardens. For the present, the door was illustrated with a white-metal plate, on which was engraven the name of LEGGES, in letters so large as to leave no doubt that this must be the identical Legges for whom the visitor might be seeking, and that all other Legges, wheresoever they might lurk, must be spurious. Quilpin Leech, turning a latchkey in the door, pushed back the name of Legges, and in three voyages, assisted by the cabman,

removed his delicacies into a narrow hall, papered with a false semblance of yellow marble, and set them on the cocoa-nut matting, to the apparent mystification of a black cat who sat on the staircase. Then he discharged his cabman. But here let it be confessed that Mr. Leech and his cabmen did not usually part on such easy terms as this. Coming home, late at night, to a silent street in a cab, the Government clerk had a simplicity all his own for saying to the driver, "Will you kindly lend me a match! I fancy I have dropped a sovereign in your cab;" whereupon, if the driver had not well pondered the policy of honest ways, Mr. Leech would be relieved of all anxiety about the fare, for the driver would lash his horse with the whip and gallop away into the darkness. But it is a comfort to add that no more than four cabmen out of five ever fell into this trap, so that the beggars to whom Mr. Leech honourably remitted the fares which he saved by the above device profited less than they might have done if we English had been on the whole a base people.

But now the door having banged behind the cabman, Quilpin Leech cried "Whish-sh!" to the black cat, to scare him away from the neighbourhood of the roast fowl and cream, then stole to the end of the passage, and leaned over a baluster which descended to the kitchen. A jig played on a church organ could not have had a more abrupt effect than the song which then issued from Mr. Leech's smileless mouth, in this wise:—

Matron, fresh as roses fair,
Tune thy lips, and tell me now,
Hast thou news for me down there?
If so, speak, say what's the row?

"Yes, Mr. Leech, there's a letter for you up in your room," answered a shrill voice from below.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Mr. Leech, as if much shocked, "this is a breach of a binding contract between parties," and vaulting astride the baluster, he slid rapidly down to the foot of the staircase, and tumbled into the kitchen, where a matron with crimson cheeks and ample throat was basting a shoulder of mutton turning before the fire. "Mrs. Legges, I am surprised at you!"

"Oh! don't worrit, Mr. Leech," screamed the lady addressed. "I'm that put out this morning that I couldn't sing if all the brass bands in London was playing to me, no, not I. What with mutton rising a penny the pound, and the butcher sticking a piece of fat under his scales—which I see with my own eyes and called attention to, scornin' unfair dealings—and the fat being put there to give a customer short weight, which I know and could a-swear to afore all the police courts as ever was, and——"

"Take breath, Mrs. Legges, you are getting embarrassed in your grammatical periods," said Mr. Leech, removing the ladle with gentle compulsion from his landlady's hands, and beginning to baste the mutton himself with magisterial solemnity. "When cool enough to weigh the sense of your obligations,

I will remind you of a compact freely entered into between us for the promotion of social harmony."

"Yes, I know, when you sing I'm to sing, Mr. Leech, but songs don't come from a frettin' heart, and it's no use expecting it," exclaimed the impatient Mrs. Legges, catching up the salt-box and throwing a handful of its contents between the grate-bars to clear the fire.

"Well, Mrs. Legges," proceeded Quilpin Leech, with a mild flourish of the ladle over the spluttering joint, "I maintain that nothing is more calculated to break the continuity of amicable relations than for one of the parties to a bargain to put his or her independent construction on it. When I undertook your musical education by means of press-orders for the opera and the plays, I begged you to consider whether the practice of enlivening conversation, by means of songs and dances, as is done on the stage, would not be conducive to the gladsomeness of life; and you were pleased to admit, speaking over a supper of oysters and porter, in the parlour upstairs, that such a practice would be so conducive, and would make you a happy woman. Did you admit that or not?"

"Oh, drop that silly talk—now do, Mr. Leech; and let me make the Second Floor's apple-dumplings in peace and quietness!" groaned flustered Mrs. Legges, spreading out some dough on a wood slab, and thumping away with a rolling-pin till the beads stood on her plump forehead. "There's Meggie'll sing for you as much as you like. The light-hearted hussey

does nothing but sing since you sent her to see them nigger minstrels; and I'll bet a 'apenny she's up to it now instead of cleaning out the cobwebs from the Second Floor's bedroom, which he complained of yesterday, swearing so that one wouldn't have thought to hear the like in a Christian country; and so I told him. But now stand out of my way, do!" and the dough being flattened, Mrs. Legges, with a knife in her hand, darted towards some plethoric pudding-apples. "I'm a-faintin' from work—that's what I am—and it's a wonder to me how you have got away from yours so early this morning, of all others, and come here, I suppose, to want a chop done for you and other things besides, taking up a body's time till two in the afternoon, till sickness'll be the end of it: that's what it'll be."

"Pause again for breath, Mrs. Legges," interrupted Quilpin Leech, still plying the ladle methodically; "but first of all one question—Is Mr. Marvell at home?"

"Yes; and up to his blessed ears in ink and paper as usual," responded Mrs. Legges, slicing savagely at the apples.

"And is Miss Marvell in?" continued Mr. Leech.

"No; Miss Grace is out, and not expected in till one," answered Mrs. Legges in a softened tone, as she swathed the reduced apples in their paste garments."

"Well, then, Mrs. Legges, you may pacify yourself about my chop," observed Mr. Leech, turning

himself from his labour of love and dripping. "If this had been an ordinary day I might have come in and said, in the words of the much-misquoted poet:—

I prythee go and get me some repast;
I care not what, so it be wholesome food.

But this is a *dies non*, which your Hebrew dictionary will explain to mean a day that never occurs in the lives of most men and seldom in that of others. In short, the ingredients of a banquet were introduced into this house ten minutes ago; and I have come to borrow your parlour for the feast which will be held as soon as Miss Marvell comes in—*Diis volentibus*—if your cat has not eaten the fowls!"

What Mrs. Legges might have replied to this there is no saying nor does it much matter, but at this moment a blithesome voice was heard, a down-at-heel but light step clattered down the staircase, and Meggie, the servant-wench, appeared with smudges on her face, a dust-pan, brush, and broom in her hands, and her apron tucked up. She had been carolling as she descended, "Coming through the rye," but at sight of Mr. Leech, immediately broke out with a laugh into—

Slap, bang! here we are again!
Here we are again! here we are again!
Slap, bang! here we are again!
Come home to play and tea.

"No!—that's the evening salute," objected Mr. Leech, holding up the ladle like a conductor's stick. "It should be the noon-tide hymn of lunch. But your voice is improving, Abigail;" and hereon en-

sued a duet, enlivened by the screaming appeals of Mrs. Legges and by the voice of a potman shouting "Bee-e-er!" from the top of the area. In the midst of it Mr. Leech escaped, clambering up the staircase three steps at a time and followed by the mirthful and draggle-tail Meggie, who in the front hall received his orders as to the disposal of his viands in a fair array on the parlour table. There was to be snowy tablecloth and napkins; all the crockery and dessert dishes which the establishment could muster; the champagne glasses from Mrs. Legges' private cupboard; a vase to stand as central piece with the bouquet in it; and eggs and oil were to be procured to the end that Mr. Leech might make *mayonnaise* sauce for his lobster. These instructions given, Mr. Leech added impressive directions that Meggie—or Abigail, as he preferred to call her—should don her gala uniform; the said gala being a Swiss peasant dress which Mr. Quilpin had bought Meggie pursuant to his theory that not only the vocalising but also the attire of the stage should be adopted in private life whenever practicable. Mr. Leech gave Meggie a brace of half-crowns to inculcate his orders, and leaving her free to conclude that he had been robbing a bank or inheriting a fortune, as she pleased, his next move was to ascend to the first floor. His countenance always gloomy became unutterably so as he knocked at a door and received an answer, sharp and waspish as an explosion—

"Who's there? I can't be disturbed."

"It's I, Mr. Marvell, and I think I have good news—good news for you and your case."

"For my case!" cried the voice in weak agitation, and there was a shuffling of slippers across the carpet, then a key turned in the lock. The door was opened and exhibited an old man in a soiled dressing-gown, who held a pen dripping with ink in his shrivelled hand, and appeared to let go the door-handle with the mistrust of one who is not used to welcome visits. He might have been sixty years of age, judging by the wisps of unkempt white hair that stood up round his high forehead, like ruffled feathers; and deep crow's-feet, the finger-marks of care and fever rather than of time wrinkled his sallow temples. There was a glare in his eyes which a doctor would have taken for the herald gleam of insanity; and he was not a sightly object, nor clean. His linen was worse than dingy; his beard a stubble; the fingers of both his hands were stained with ink that looked many days old; and the room to which he reluctantly admitted Mr. Leech was a den strewn with papers more madly than a printer's shop. Newspapers with gashes in them where paragraphs had been cut out, books of law lying open back uppermost, printed proof slips, and heaps of manuscript written in a wild hand on folios of foolscap, were littered round a writing-table coated thick with dust, and covered with a rubbish of rusty pens, old letters, and empty ink bottles. It was the lair of a man who had disowned Society, or been disowned.

"What is it?" inquired Mr. Marvell, stepping back, and drawing his dressing-gown closer over his furrowed throat. "I am terribly busy, Leech. I wrote to Mr. Dexter, who you told me was the editor of that new paper which is coming out, and asked him to take up my case. He answered, and begged me to explain my wrongs, and I am drawing up my case in full for him. A paper dealing with law matters is just the organ I wanted."

"I think, though, I have something better than that," said Quilpin Leech picking a "Digest of Civil Law" out of the coal-scuttle. "Catch hold of my sleeve if you find the news too much for you."

"What is it?" repeated the old man, with wizen anxiety.

"I have got transferred to the Australia Office," said Mr. Leech. "Since this morning I am Lord Mayrose's private secretary, and I shall be able to see now that your case has a proper hearing." And he briefly gave an account of how his great rise had come about.

"Ah! I knew the day would arrive at last," gasped Mr. Marvell, as the glare in his eyes deepened to a glow. "I knew my wrong couldn't remain for ever unavenged. For it's a damning wrong, Leech; it's a wrong that would make the stones cry out. No man was ever injured as I have been."

"Well, everything will come right now," rejoined Quilpin rubbing his large ears with conviction. "It happens that my new master is my cousin, though I

have not boasted about it before, for cousins are like frogs, only worth cultivating when you've a use for them. But now I want you to come and lunch with me, to solemnise this unusual sort of day; and perhaps Miss Marvell will do me the honour. . . ."

"Yes, my daughter—but where is she?" exclaimed Mr. Marvell, striking his forehead absently, as if he had said: "Where is my penholder?" "Oh, yes, she's out. She came home two days ago from her school for the Easter holidays, and has gone to see her friend Miss Pennywon, daughter of Sir Ham, the Member. I was thinking he might bring my case before Parliament; but Grace doesn't like to talk about it; she doesn't understand, nor more did my son, who emigrated to Melbourne, understand. None of them can see through this case."

"Miss Marvell will be in by luncheon time?" asked Quilpin Leech wagging his rebellious tuft of hair like a point of interrogation.

"I am afraid she will. We should be much better alone, you and I, under these new circumstances, for I could talk my case over with you, and remind you of the strong points. You see, Leech, it's a case that needs learning by heart almost, and a girl will be in our way."

Quilpin did not seem to think this, and proved it by a slight twitching of his lower jaw, as if he were swallowing something hot.

"We can talk of your case all the same before to-morrow, and we will, if we sit up the night for it," he

observed, glumly; "but now I'll leave you, and I'll come to take Miss Marvell down when everything's ready. But mind, I've told Lord Mayrose that I've a case for his notice. So bring an appetite with you, for your redress is in the bud."

"You're a good lad," muttered the old man, shambling feebly back to his desk. "I'll finish my case, though, for this new paper. Friends seem mustering up around me at last, but God knows I can't afford to lose one of them."

And whilst his comforter withdrew, Mr. Marvell bent over his work and shivered with cold, though the air was tepid outside. His pen crinkled over the paper, the sheets slid away from him when filled, deeper and deeper grew the fire in his eyes; and he wrote and wrote—tales of wrongs and sufferings, and appeals for right, which would never be read—unless, indeed, there be a Power which takes account of such appeals, and docket them among Archives which are not of this earth.

Mr. Job Marvell was a man who had "a grievance."

CHAPTER XXV.

A Man with a Grievance.

WHAT is a man with a grievance? So far as Mr. Marvell was concerned, the explanation can be given briefly. In days when he was not white-haired and bestowed care on his person Mr. Marvell had held an appointment under Government in one of the Australian colonies. It was a responsible post, which means that the titular was an object of envy to place-hunters at home, and a butt for never-ending criticisms to the people whose affairs he had to regulate abroad. Mr. Marvell however got on fairly with enviers and detractors till destiny sent him as a subordinate an offshoot of the two great houses of Drone and Midge, with whom he found it impossible to get on at all. This was a pity, for by doing himself a little violence he might have got on as well with the young Drone-Midge as with the others; and it is to be noted that there are some people with whom one must get on just as one gets into a highly-starched shirt every morning, however uncomfortable the starch may feel at first. But perhaps Mr. Marvell under-estimated the moral worth of the young Drone-Midge or the strength of his family connections; anyhow there was that want

of cordiality between the two which can never be fully appeased until one of the parties goes to the wall. Now Mr. Marvell tried to plant the young Drone-Midge against the wall, and the young Drone-Midge butted back with both his horns down, like a very energetic young goat as he was. Mr. Marvell wrote despatches to the Home-Government praying that Mr. Drone-Midge might be recalled if her Majesty's service was to be conducted as heretofore; and Mr. Drone-Midge sent counter despatches as also private letters, heaping up charges against Mr. Marvell, and averring that her Majesty's service could in no manner proceed if this official retained his place. In such junctures one must either concede the principle that a chief may exact implicit obedience from his subordinates and require their summary dismissal when they are fractious, or one must take up the contrary position that the fractious subordinate, if well connected, has a right to demand the recall of his uncongenial chief. The Home-Government, represented throughout these difficulties by Mr. Keane-Midge, the Permanent and Irresponsible Under-Secretary of the Australia Office, declined committing itself to either of these views, but advised Mr. Marvell to be more accommodating; with this result that the young Drone-Midge, feeling himself supported, followed his own course, the affairs of her Majesty's service got into a mess, and Mr. Marvell bore the blame, being responsible, whereas Mr. Drone-Midge was not. Additional acid was infused into the business by the

conduct of some of the mercantile colonists, over whose goings-on Mr. Marvell had kept a somewhat too sharp eye, and who, now divining that a well-connected and well-bred young official like Mr. Drone-Midge must be more powerful than a man who owed his position to mere merit, retaliated on Mr. Marvell for the grudges they owed him, and took the subordinate's part. So in the upshot it came to this—that when blames innumerable had accumulated on Mr. Marvell's head for mismanagement, which was none of his making, when half the mercantile community were arrayed against him, and when the other half who had taken no sides in the dispute at first were growing clamorous for the sake of rest, that the dispute should end somehow—then a squabbling matter arose in which either Mr. Marvell or Mr. Drone-Midge must be culpable, though both could not be so. Let us be sure that Mr. Drone-Midge acted at this stage of the crisis, as he had done throughout, with perfect good faith, and that it was a sincere grief to him that he could not co-operate with his chief as he would have desired; on the other hand, let there be no doubt that the Permanent Mr. Keane-Midge's long experience at the Australia Office enabled him to decide, with the utmost equity, who was censurable in a quarrel where a relative of his own was one of the contendants. He did decide, and judging, as we should all of us have done, that the blame must lie on Mr. Marvell, who was chief and responsible, and not on Mr. Drone-Midge, who was subordinate and

irresponsible, he requested Mr. Marvell to resign. Mr. Marvell refused, and was ill-advised enough to put his case into the hands of an independent M.P.—one of those Westminster mosquitoes without kith or kin who sting the occupants of the Treasury Bench with unpleasant questions and buzz annoyingly. But this was a declaration of war, and when a great department of the State is attacked, what wonder that it should defend itself? The Australia Office—that is, Mr. Keane-Midge as before—issued a Blue-book, compiled of all the charges brought against Mr. Marvell by the angry mercantile folk, by Mr. Drone-Midge, and others—forgot, probably by an oversight, to print his refutations along with them, and dismissed him the service. From that day Mr. Marvell was “a Man with a Grievance,” and his prose filled the newspapers.

Now it is astonishing what a number of people there are with a grievance, and what a fuss they will make in the papers. They must be endowed with that robust faith which rebuffs cannot shake, nor precedents enlighten; for the press is as helpless an instrument as well may be for remedying any instance of private hardship in connection with Government. Editors echo the groans of masses, not of individuals. A hundred men who have been wronged of sixpence apiece are more interesting than one man who has been despoiled of ten thousand; and if the man who has lost his ten thousand thinks differently, and prints columns to prove that the ten thousand ought still to

be in his possession, the best he can hope is to be charged with having stated his case with a great deal too much animus, and with having consequently thrown away any claim to public sympathy. Animus is indeed a thing to be avoided; and the man who has been aggrieved cannot learn too soon to view his sufferings with a dispassionate eye. He must be prepared to own that much of his grievance was due to his own fault, and that, however certain systems may have been indirectly to blame as regards him, the conduct of all the individuals from first to last concerned in his ruin was actuated by the purest motives. Else we should come upon the utterly untenable proposition that two or more men may have conspired together to damage a third, which would never do: for if once we were to grant that a personage in place could have borne malice, there is no knowing where such a theory might land us. If the Man with a Grievance has sense enough to grasp these truths; if he is the first to declare that his discomfiture can only be the result of a very pardonable error; if he has money enough left to give pleasant dinners and to obtain a seat in Parliament; if he is cheerful and patient, humble and never importunate; if he abstains from making anything like a noise, and, above all, from associating his own affair with those of other malcontents having grievances — then in course of time it is just possible that he may right himself so far that people will agree with him that, by his own showing, he was a fool, though perhaps not a mis-

chievous one. But whatever he does let him keep from print, for print means hubbub; and the editor who absolutely declines to insert a single line of his remonstrances, renders him the greatest of services.

Unhappily for himself, Mr. Marvell had not been competent to grasp these truths. His dismissal had ruined him, and he was so unreasonable in trying to enlist public indignation against this wholly personal wrong, that he became a great nuisance to editors, who soon belaboured him with leaders in their self-defence, and finally shut their doors on him. Then began that second stage in the Odyssey of men with a grievance—the stage of appeals to Government “graciously to reconsider my case.” Mr. Marvell addressed petitions to the succeeding Ministers who were appointed to the Australia Office, and petitions to the Sovereign; but these processes amounted as a matter of fact to considerings and re-considerings of his case by the Permanent Mr. Keane-Midge, who had dismissed him. When a new Minister received Mr. Marvell’s petition, he naturally applied to Mr. Keane-Midge for information about the alleged grievance; and when the Sovereign received the petition, she, too, as bound by the Constitution, referred it to the Minister—in other words, to the Permanent Keane-Midge, who again pronounced judgment on his own work; so that, although in course of time Mr. Marvell obtained half-a-dozen official confirmations of his dismissal, he had virtually been condemned by one man alone, who had acted successively as prosecutor, judge

of first instance, judge on appeal, and had wound up by approving his various judgments in the name of the Crown. A military or naval officer who is accused has at least a court-martial to try him, but an official under Government has no claim to a trial; he must go through the above tribulations exactly as Mr. Marvell did, and when he has been cold-shouldered by the press, and had all his appeals rebuffed, he will pass into the third phase of "grievance." Then it is that he sets up in lodgings, and sniffs the air for all new journals which may be started, and for new politicians who rise up with a cry for "Reform!" He becomes a bore.

It was in this last phase of his grievance-urging that Mr. Marvell had become known to Quilpin Leech through their both lodging under the same roof: but wherefore Quilpin Leech had taken an interest in a case which had long ceased to interest any other human being, is a matter for his concern, not ours. One can only say Mr. Marvell was not interesting in manners or temper. There are some men who spurn a grievance under their foot, and rise high by it as off a spring-board; others who do not rise, but whose private virtues increase even as the fertility of soil increases when it is ploughed to its depths; but Mr. Marvell went the ways of the weak and querulous. He had become captious, spleenful, and offensive; a disagreeable old man, who would have been the better for soap and water, and who shook his case under the noses of all comers like a poor maniac rattling his

chains. Nevertheless Quilpin Leech adhered to him.

But it was not, surely, for the Man with the Grievance that Quilpin had bought the bouquet, the Yorkshire pie, the strawberries; not for him that he sat in the parlour with a salad-bowl between his knees, and beating up eggs, oil, and vinegar to make *mayonnaise* sauce such as Frenchmen love. Surely it was not for him either that he gave a mighty start when a barouche clattered up to the door shortly after one, rousing all the echoes of Surrey Street, and bringing numerous peering faces to the windows. The coachman of the barouche wore black gloves and epaulettes, and so did the footman, who gracefully stepped down and banged at the door till the parlour where Dr. Johnson may have supped was shaken to its roots, along with the whole house over-head. Then, through the parlour-blind Mr. Leech saw Grace Marvell descend, and behind her a compact young lady, all in black, save collars and cuffs, white and spruce as steel. "Now, what can all this mean?" murmured the clerk, as he renewed his beating operations with depressed vigour, making the wooden salad-spoon go flap-flop in the yellow sauce.

He was soon to know what it meant. The young ladies having ascended to Miss Grace's room, footsteps were shortly heard coming down as far as Mr. Marvell's study; then a knock, some peevish conversation audible through the ceiling; after this an impatient ring, and in due course Meggie entered and

asked Mr. Leech to relinquish his bowl and go up to Mr. Marvell, who wanted him. Meggie had put on her Swiss costume, eke washed her face, so that with scarlet skirt, velvet bodice, and speckless chemisette—articles of raiment which, by the way, occasioned much grief and scandal to Mrs. Legges—she looked well capable of looking after the foreign sauce, which Quilpin sorrowfully resigned to her, wondering whether anything were going to happen now to mar his carefully-prepared banquet.

He ran upstairs, and there Mr. Marvell confronted him, clothed in a shabby coat and boots, but looking one shade more respectable than before.

“Leech, here’s Grace and her friend Miss Pennywon want to take me out for a drive,” he whined, biting the feather off the quill which so seldom left his hands. “Tell her it can’t be; we are going to talk over my case after luncheon. I am going to be righted at last, Grace; you’ll have no need to teach then; we’ll have our carriage, as we had before. But it’s no use my telling the girl all that; she doesn’t believe it.”

“Papa has not been out of doors for a month, Mr. Leech,” said Grace Marvell, as she shook the clerk’s hand. It seemed as if she paid little attention to what her father said. “Please tell him the fresh air will do him good.”

“No, I cannot recommend fresh air without a preliminary of sustaining food,” answered Quilpin Leech, in dismay. “Supposing you rather ask Miss

Pennywon to come and join us? She doesn't know me, but luncheon isn't compromising, and I have added a cubit to my stature since this morning."

Grace Marvell, who shone like a young Juno with her queenly stature and sculptural form beside the rat-faced clerk, made a hesitating gesture.

"It's very kind of you, Mr. Leech, but the carriage is waiting."

"Carriages were made to wait, and if this one is unused to it, let it go, and Miss Pennywon shall return in the grandest cab I can find."

It was not easy to argue with the clerk, and Grace Marvell, whose acquaintanceship with him was but two days old, was not so inured to his eccentricities as to know the weak parts of them. She appeared to consider him as crazed as her father, and perhaps in a way as the latter's abettor and evil counsellor. But, after a little parley, she yielded to his invitation, because Mr. Marvell had returned to his desk and looked as if nothing short of violence would transport him to the barouche. In the upshot, Mary Pennywon was asked whether she would come and lunch with Mr. Quilpin Leech, and she cheerfully said she would on hearing him described as "a gentleman who means well towards papa."

"It's very good-natured of you to accept such a rough and ready invitation," said the clerk, when the presentation had been effected in that dreary room, among the dust and papers.

"It's more good-natured of you to make it," answered unceremonious Mary.

"Leech means to regale us, because he has been promoted to be Secretary to Lord Mayrose, and Lord Mayrose is his cousin," stammered Mr. Marvell, giving his arm to Mary, and leading the way downstairs with unsteady steps. "If Lord Mayrose rights me, I'll regale you too. All my happiness and honour are now in the hands of that young man."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Mr. Leech's Luncheon.

A BACHELOR who spreads his board for two young ladies, both pretty, both almost strangers to him, and who, moreover, has no brother bachelor to help him keep up the ball of talk, is not always fortunate in entertaining. For in such festivals awkward pauses occur. The young ladies are not quite sure how far the bachelor may be disposed to go in his gallant attentions, and they sit on their guard; the bachelor, on his side, wonders whether the purity of his intentions can be mistaken, and feels nervous. If a joke falls flat, a second joke comes with difficulty, and the temperature may sink wholly to zero if there be an old gentleman present who fills up the pauses with scraps about his grievances. Luckily, Mary Pennywon was a small person who never let sociability languish for want of chat. She was too plain-spoken for that, and in this instance she and the Government clerk seemed to have become good friends at first sight. If any foreigner roaming disconsolately down this dreary street of a city which might be the finest in the world, but for vestries and Midge government—if any foreigner glancing over the blinds at Mrs.

Legges's had seen Meggie in her Swiss dress flit around that beflowered table with the plates, while Quilpin Leech with a corkscrew in his hands was unwiring a champagne bottle and making its cork fly with a pop to the ceiling, he would have guessed this youth to be a lucky dog "in good fortune." Lucky dog Quilpin was in every way, though his face revealed nothing of it. It would have wrung your heart to see his profound melancholy as he dissected the chickens, and the woful air he wore in asking Mr. Marvell to try his hand at the ham and the pies; but there is such a thing as smiling with the eyes, and from the direction which Quilpin Leech's eye-smiles took, it was easy to divine that he was in love with Grace Marvell.

During the first part of the repast Grace's father sat carving his food with a feebly senile abstraction, and fumbling bits of it on to the table-cloth or into his lap; but as the good cheer warmed him and the generous wines sent enlivening gusts into his head, his dazed senses became cleared, and some of the language and manners of former days returned to him fitfully. Then he talked like one who had been a man of merit and a gentleman, alluded to his travels, and took an interest in what was being said. But while his demeanour underwent this transformation it was curious to watch the look of surprise that stole on Grace Marvell. Grace was a lovely girl, to whose beauty full justice was scarcely done in the brief description of a previous chapter. Hers was a beauty of commanding air, fascinating, enthralling—the beauty

that a painter would have chosen as a model for one of the imperial heroines who have left a name in history. She was no more in her place in this lodging-house than a rare opal would be in a setting of pinchbeck; but for all this she did not seem a very affectionate daughter. When her father alluded to his wrongs, her shapely brow would contract into a slight frown of impatience; and his helpless, invalid way of eating made her redden. So visible were these symptoms of insensibility that comparing her attitude with that of Mary Pennywon, who spoke with a pitying respect and tenderness to the old man, it might have been inferred that it was Mary and not Grace who was wretched Mr. Marvell's child.

"You must take heart, Mr. Marvell," prattled Mary, when a chance word had brought the inevitable grievance to the front again. "Justice always comes at last to everybody."

"Let me give you some of this *mayonnaise*, Mr. Marvell," suggested Quilpin. "As Miss Pennywon says, justice comes to everybody; she waits for us at the first turning in the long lane."

"I'll explain you my case, Miss Pennywon," stammered Mr. Marvell, with the wandering gleam returning to his eyes. "It may be classed under three heads, you see. Firstly——"

"Oh, please not now, papa; explain it some other day," broke out Grace, laying one of her white hands beseechingly on her father's sleeve.

"You shall tell it at full length to papa and me,

and we will read up all the papers about it," said Mary, soothingly, as if she were addressing a child; "but," she added, "I was astonished at Grace never speaking to me about it before during the year she has been at Penny. Why didn't you tell papa all the story, Grace? He might have helped you long ago."

"I did not feel justified in troubling Sir Ham with our affairs," answered Grace, coldly.

"Grace doesn't understand my case; she never did!" sighed Mr. Marvell, in a forlorn accent. "My own child calls it 'a trouble,' but I don't want to trouble anybody. All I ask for is my right."

"Papa will easily be able to see right done to you now he is in Parliament," continued Mary with confidence. "Grace and I were at school together you know, and she need not have had secrets from me. I thought till yesterday that you had only been ruined as to money, which is nothing; I never suspected it was a trouble of this kind, which had been lasting for years too!"

"You have a good heart, dear young lady," murmured old Mr. Marvell, with a palsied shake of knife and fork; "so has Leech, who has been a true friend to me, honest fellow."

"Another glass of champagne, Mr. Marvell, and drive care away," cried Quilpin, briskly lifting the bottle; "and here I'll propose a toast to Lord Mayrose, and a strong hand to him in sparring with Mr. Midge!"

"Ay, to Lord Mayrose!" quavered Mr. Marvell, as he raised his glass, spilling most of its contents into his plate: and the toast was drunk with some cordiality by the two men. But it did not escape Mr. Leech that Mary barely wetted her lips and then laid down her glass with one of those prim little gestures that were familiar to her when she thought more than she cared to say. The clerk noticed that these gestures recurred every time Mayrose's name was mentioned, and they seemed to express no great enthusiasm for the peer. Seeing the clerk's eyes on her, Mary said quietly, "I hope Lord Mayrose will do his duty!"

So the feast continued. The savoury meats gave place to the sweet; the tart and cream, the biscuits and fruit had all their turn; and, trifling over these dainties as pretty women love to do, and should be invited to do whenever feasible, the afternoon wore on apace and glided towards evening. Quilpin Leech in this interval took many an occasion for gallant talk with Grace, and such was the style of his gallantry that he finished by making his enchantress laugh. It was pretty to see her laugh. As she got to understand the clerk her manner softened into a pleasing familiarity, and, sum total, she and Quilpin were on the best terms by the afternoon's end. Spring evening in the Strand districts is heralded in by other sounds than those which accompany it in more habitable quarters. A mist rises from the river and steals up the streets in grey clouds, and the

penny steamers, overloaded with their human freight, plough their way through the surf with audible groans. The voices of the newsboys selling second editions of cheap papers, the call of the milkman, the merry note of the muffin-bell, stir various echoes; and over all roars the tide of City traffic flowing westward. The day is over, and men of money return to the graces of social pursuits, to smooth talk and drawing-room display—in other words, the worshippers of Mammon having paid their useful devotions to gold, go and sacrifice a little for pleasure's sake to Gammon. Are not Mammon and Gammon, indeed, the Gog and Magog of our social system?

CHAPTER XXVII.

Mr. Leech makes a Proposal.

THE approach of evening was a signal for Mary Pennywon to go away; and as Grace offered to accompany her friend, Quilpin volunteered to serve them as escort, and to ride or drive back with Grace as she should prefer. His proposal was accepted without difficulty, and he was honoured by Grace's acceptance of the bouquet which had excited the admiration of both young ladies. "You are extremely polite, Mr. Leech," said Grace, with a smile which might have brought a less enamoured man to his knees in ecstasy—one of those smiles most sweet because full of rare coquetry. "I will keep the flowers in remembrance of this very pleasant afternoon."

Thus the feast having ended as agreeably as it had begun, Grace and Mary went upstairs to put on their bonnets; and Mr. Leech, after affectionately planting Mr. Marvell in an arm-chair and exhorting him to take a nap, slid down astride the balusters to the kitchen, to congratulate Meggie on her mode of waiting at table, and to bid her signal to some street-boy to fetch a cab. In the kitchen was Mrs. Legges,

delighting herself with tea and periwinkles; and it must be supposed that owing to information received, as policemen say, she was disposed to be extra gracious to her lodger, for she smiled on him. Had she procured her information through the key-hole, as the traditions of Surrey Street affirmed it was her harmless practice to do, or was it by intuitive operation that she had become aware of Mr. Leech's altered prospects? Anyhow she said, with the butter of a round of toast glistening on her ruddy lips—

“Most kind of you it was, Mr. Leech, to give that nice dejoinay, or whatever you call it, to them young ladies; and it will be a blessing to Mr. Legges when he hears this very night that you've had four hundred a year added to your wages, though it'll be his hope, as it is mine, that riches won't part pleasant company, seeing that you can have the ground-floor bedroom and parlour all to yourself; and Mr. Legges only too glad of the inconvenience which it won't cause either of us, you may be sure.”

“Mrs. Legges!” said Quilpin Leech, sternly; “I believe Mr. Legges is a myth. I have come in at all hours and never met him; the postman has not been more fortunate; and the milkman, if he has ever gone thoughtfully into the subject, must be convinced that Mr. Legges has no habitation save on the door-plate.”

“Lor, Mr. Leech! how can you say so—and Legges eating his breakfast here every morning as punctual as may be, and only coming home at night when

everyone's abed—which it's the Queen's taxes that keeps him moving about all the blessed day, so that he's glad of a Sunday to lie down and not stir more than a bundle of clothes for the wash; and a leaner body you never set eyes on, all along of the fault of Mr. Owle, our old lodger, as is now Sir Blinkwell—and a Judge in the Pleas, who got him this place instead of a decent clerkship, where he could have sat down to his work and ate his meals like a Christian——”

“Pause for breath, Mrs. Legges,” interrupted Quilpin, helping himself to a periwinkle; “but I beg to observe that Mr. Justice Owle comes up frequently in your conversation. His early hours have been commended to me when I returned home at two in the morning; his simplicity has put me to shame every time I have rung too loudly for shaving-water. May I augur that at some future date you will take to saying: ‘Sir Quilpin Leech, that amiable young man, who never caused an hour's anxiety to Mr. Legges or myself!’”

“Be sure there's nothing more likely, for barring songs which is out of place on Sundays in a Christian house, and in heathen clothes which never looks so well on Meggie as a plain gown would have done—stuff, or silk, or even printed cotton, a better behaved young man than you, Mr. Leech, and more regular with his rent, I never wish to meet; and a sad day it will be to Legges if you leave us.”

“Well, on that matter let us touch some other day,” replied Quilpin, with a change in his tone.

“Say to-morrow, for I may have more news to give you then. At present I hear the charioteer approaching with his *quadriga*,” and, leaving the kitchen, Quilpin, with all the alacrity of a man in love, sprang upstairs.

The cab stood at the door, the young ladies were handed into it, and the clerk jumped in with them; but of the memorable ride they took to Sir Ham Pennywon’s mansion in Kensington we have no purpose to speak. Suffice it that when the mansion was reached Grace Marvell and the clerk were invited to come in as courtesy required, and refused as is also courteous custom. Grace desired to go back and make tea for her father; Quilpin said he hoped to strike up Sir Ham’s acquaintance in a more ceremonious manner on a future occasion; and with this they took leave of hospitable Mary on the doorstep. But it was not yet twilight, tea-time was still distant, and Grace being asked whether she would ride home or walk part of the way, admitted without embarrassment that she should like a stroll through the Park—so far at least as Apsley House—where they could take a fresh cab to the Strand. Accordingly she and the ugly clerk crossed over to Kensington Gardens, and might have been seen during the next hour sauntering at their leisure towards the Serpentine, thence beside Rotten Row, and so to the group where Achilles perseveringly holds up the remnant of an umbrella to protect himself and the trunk of Hector from the London blacks.

They chatted all the way, and more than one pedestrian glanced aside to admire the luck of that ill-favoured man who had on his arm a girl so ravishing. Grace, though simply dressed, had the art of making every part of her apparel repose the eye by its good taste, and assuredly no one would have taken her for a village schoolmistress up in town for a fortnight's holiday. She looked rather like one of those beauties who are to be met with at times in foreign training establishments for the stage—girls who are nothing to-day, but who will have all the world at their feet to-morrow, and be rightly called *Divas*. At the Achilles group, finding herself a little weary, she paused before crossing the roadway. Twilight still tarried, being in that uncertain phase when a bright spring day is melting away into a clear moonlight; there were still a few riders in the Row, and tardy barouches had not done leaving the Park. "It is early to go home; shall we sit down a little on one of these chairs?" proposed Quilpin, who for the last ten minutes had been visibly fidgety, like a man who has a communication to make, but does not know how to lead up to it. Just as he was saying this a carriage flashed by the lodge opposite with three ladies in it, rolling out towards Constitution Hill. "There goes Lady Rosemary and her daughters, I believe," added the clerk, leading Grace to a chair.

"One of those Ladies Carol was to have married your cousin, Lord Mayrose, they say," remarked Grace when seated.

"The papers printed it, but it was untrue. Talking of that, though, why does Miss Pennywon look so displeased when my cousin's name comes up?"

"I don't know that she is displeased; but Mary is very true-hearted, and I think she heard from someone that Lord Mayrose had not behaved well about this very marriage—tried to marry for money, which is a great crime in Mary's eyes."

"She wrongs Mayrose," answered the clerk, astonished; "but it would need a big assize court to judge all Miss Pennywon's criminals."

"Perhaps she would not care to have them all judged," said Grace; "but Mary's father and Lord Mayrose are neighbours, and Sir Ham has so good an opinion of Lord Mayrose that he praises him too often to Mary's taste. This reminds me, however, Mr. Leech, that I have to thank you for your great kindness to my father."

"There has been no kindness at all, Miss Marvell."

"Oh, yes. I know you have given him money, taken an interest in his case, paid printing for him, and all that. Our landlady speaks with real emotion of the many acts of kindness you have shown, and I, as his daughter, feel very grateful to you. But I was going to ask you," and Grace hesitated a moment, "do you think it worth while to encourage my father longer in his delusions?"

"What delusions?"

"Well, in his delusions about his grievances," said Grace, with a calmness that sounded icy in a girl

alluding to her father. "It is very good of you to promise that you will appeal to Lord Mayrose for him, but you must see that he could not be reinstated in any office. He is almost," here she hesitated again a moment, "I was going to say almost, but I may say quite, insane."

Quilpin, evidently unsettled, drew a clearly marked isosceles triangle on the gravel with his umbrella.

"Mr. Marvell is not always quite cool, I admit; no man is who has been flung out of a window without knowing why; but he would grow better if righted; and at all events we could obtain him the pension of which he has been deprived—unjustly, you know."

"But do you think that probable?"

"Those things are not always probable, but they come to pass at times," answered the clerk, drawing a figure of the fifth proposition of Euclid, as if to hint that there is a short road even to justice if you have the key to it.

"But, supposing you should fail?" and this time Grace fixed her sapphire eyes questioningly on the clerk.

"Well, failure is like physic; it's no use looking at it till the time comes for swallowing; but we *may* fail"—and here Quilpin brought his umbrella to a standstill, and became dumb a moment, scrutinising its death's head. When he spoke again it was in a much lower tone. "I wished to talk to you about that, Miss Marvell. Let us hope for success; but as

you say we may fail, and in that case I confess I should like Mr. Marvell to be placed beyond reach of want."

"I will of course send papa all I can of my earnings," replied Grace, a little fretfully; "but I think Sir Ham would do something for him—get him into an asylum, where he would have rest."

"An asylum, no! I have a simpler way than that," rejoined the clerk, still in a low tone, but with growing animation. "I am going to be rich now. I have three hundred a year for my clerkship, and other four hundred from the secretaryship, and before my cousin leaves office I daresay he will get me some berth where I shall be well off for life. So you see I shall be able to take care of Mr. Marvell."

"But we have no claim on you whatever for this generosity!" exclaimed Grace.

"Seven hundred a year is more than enough for two; still you could give me a claim, Miss Marvell, and a life-long one." The ugly clerk, as he faltered these words, turned about in his chair and gazed at the splendid girl beside him, but looked humble, almost to sheepishness. "Excuse me for saying this—it's sudden, I know; but from the first moment I saw you I thought I should not like you to go back as mistress to that school. I have been wondering all to-day how you would take it if I offered to give *you* and your father a home. I am a sorry sort of fellow, but I would do so much to deserve this happiness."

"If I interpret your offer rightly, it is a most kind

one," replied Grace, blushing, but in quite a collected way. "This, however, can never be, Mr. Leech. Don't be pained if I answer so plainly."

"Of course I did not think we could be married at once," pursued the clerk, ruefully. "At first sight of you I knew that I should end by making this offer, and I thought it better to ask before any other man had addressed you. It will require time before you can know me; but don't say 'Never,' yet; unless I have come too late—have I?"

"Neither too late nor too early, Mr. Leech; but I say 'Never,' notwithstanding—for your own sake."

"Oh, for my own sake! You wouldn't answer that if you know what I feel. If I lived a hundred years I could never forget the moment I first met you—you had the bonnet you are wearing now. People say those things in books, but I feel them."

"You do not know me, Mr. Leech," said Grace, gently, but with untroubled firmness. "I warn you against myself, because I am certain I could never make you a good wife, and you would repent all your days having judged my character from my face. It is only because of your great goodness that I make this avowal, and because I do not wish you to think that I ever expect to meet with a man I could respect more than I do you. But I will be perfectly frank—I will never marry a poor man."

"Poor!" echoed Quilpin, in piteous amazement. "Is money, then, the only hindrance?"

"Yes; but it is a great hindrance. I am not of a nature to live contentedly in a poor household, eking out a small income, and supporting a man in his struggles for bare sustenance. If I marry at all it will be a man who has great wealth, or rank that may bring him wealth. Otherwise I will not marry. I may tell you that Mary Pennywon has dissuaded me from returning to that school, and wants me to come and stay with her as a friend. I think I shall accept her invitation for a time, and by-and-by, if I do not find a husband who can give me all that makes life worth having, I think I shall go on to the stage."

"You are saying all this because you think I shall dislike you after this, as if I would believe anything you said against yourself!" ejaculated Quilpin.

"You think what I say is horribly cynical," rejoined Grace, quietly. "Well, it is, perhaps; but I am only revealing my thoughts to you exactly as they are. Other girls have a purpose like mine, and act upon it, though they cloak their designs and feign disinterestedness. I should feign, too, before any man but yourself; but I tell you the truth that you may be cured of any sentiment that may attract you towards me. Every woman has her destiny, and mine is not to be the wife of a struggling man. If we ever meet again in the world, remember what I have told you, and be sure that whatever may be my lot, it will be happier than if we two had linked our common poverty."

"Two poverties sometimes combine into happi-

ness and make a paradise," protested the clerk. "You might use me as you liked, torment me, bully me, ruin me, I should never be unhappy."

"You say that now," smiled Grace, "but you would think differently when you found me fretting for things you could not give me, and exciting your jealousy by repining that I had not accepted the offer of some richer man. But it is time for us to go," added she, rising. "Let us remain friends, Mr. Leech—good friends. And now one word more. Do you really think there is any grievance in my father's case?"

"Why, I do, upon my life," asserted the clerk, dismayed by so much coldness, and he lifted his umbrella spasmodically, as if he were going to swear by it. "But have you never gone into the papers?"

"No. All I know is that we were well off once, and that my father suddenly lost his place, after training me to expensive tastes. I do not blame him, but as I could not remedy his wrongs I had no interest in hearing his justification. If you think, however, that there is a chance of his being righted I will help in the work, for I wish to be put out of suspense as soon as possible. Will you take me with you tomorrow to Lord Mayrose? I know him, and if my father's case is to be pleaded at all, *I* can plead it."

She looked fearlessly at the clerk, and her cold, bewitching face, rendered pale in the moonlight, which now shimmered through the trees, was like that of some marble goddess. The clerk could only bow his

head submissively and say: "Yes, I will take you. It had not occurred to me before, but I feel no doubt of success now," and the wretched fellow drew a sigh as the glowworm may have done who fell in love with the star.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Zellie's Betrothal.

It was a fine morning in Belgravia, and Lord Rosemary, who had a cabinet council to attend, was arrayed in the sprucest of white waistcoats, and drew on the freshest of lavender gloves. But his usually serene features were overcast, and he glanced out of the window at his brougham as if he were loth to leave the house.

"I do not like Zellie's looks—the poor child is quite altered," he said, plaintively. "You are sure she is not yielding to this marriage against her inclination?"

"It will not be a love match, dear," answered the Countess, "but Zellie accepts it as the only reasonable alternative after what has happened. Lord Hornette has placed us in a very embarrassing predicament."

"He has behaved in a high-handed way, and I do not like it at all," complained Lord Rosemary. "He and the Drones have been saying everywhere that in that unlucky newspaper paragraph Freddy's name was a misprint for his, so that we couldn't refuse him now without setting people whispering. It looks as if he were forcing us."

"We must excuse a great deal out of his love for our child," said the Countess, gently.

"I wish Freddy had loved poor Zell," sighed the Earl. "If I thought it was only a misunderstanding that kept them apart, I would go to him and make everything right. We must not stand on ceremony where Zellie's happiness is concerned."

The Countess shook her head rather sadly:

"I do not think that would be of any use. Lord Hornette assured me that Freddy had declared to him on his word that he was not in love with Zellie; and Freddy's promptitude in consenting to the newspaper denial bears out the statement. Freddy behaved very well in the matter. He had not time to communicate with us before going to the newspaper offices, for Lord Hornette seems to have led him away at a moment's notice; but he wrote me a very proper letter on the morrow, evidently under the impression that we were anxious for Zellie to marry Lord Hornette."

"I suppose the truth is Mayrose is courting Miss Pennywon. You saw how he reddened that evening when I mentioned her name at Elmwood?"

"We cannot blame him if such be the case," remarked the Countess, with generosity. "Miss Pennywon would bring him back all his father's estates, and he may consider that there is something of filial duty in such a match. I confess that I was one of the first to suggest it to him when he came home; and

though he made light of the advice then, he may have reflected on it since, especially as he had not seen Miss Pennywon when I first spoke to him."

"Well, well, it's a disappointing world," exclaimed the sunny Lord Keeper, dejectedly. "I never conjectured that Zellie could fall in love with Fred, but on hearing it, I felt that there was not a man in England I would sooner have as a son-in-law. At what time is Hornette coming to propose?"

"He said he would be here at one o'clock," said the Countess, as Lord Rosemary finished buttoning his gloves. "Zellie has promised to accept him, but he will be told that her heart cannot be his for the present."

So it was. Zellie Carol had agreed to become Lord Hornette's wife!

She could scarcely do otherwise after learning that Mayrose did not love her. Lady Rosemary, Violet, everybody else had affectionately pointed out to her that after her name had been publicly connected with Mayrose's it was urgent she should either reject Lord Hornette at once or accept him, in order that there might be no second *contretemps* of the same sort. A few days before Zellie had vowed to Violet never to accept the Earl, but this was before Mayrose had let it go forth to the world that he would not have her as his wife, and now she no longer cared whom she married. The bud that has broken off its stem and blown to the ground anybody may pick up.

Let it not be supposed she was insensible. All

the anguish which every girl feels when her first hopes have been blighted—when a man proves false, or, loved in secret, appears to spurn her, had seared Zellie's heart to its depths. But she was of that proud aristocratic blood which endeavours to bear love-pangs in silence, and her education had taught her that she had duties towards her parents as well as herself. Since she could never love another man as she loved Mayrose, and yet, since marry she must, unless her father and mother were to be eternally grieved—why should she not marry Lord Hornette, who was a gentleman, and a true one? It would be a *mariage de raison*, without a spark of romance on her side; but young ladies in society make such marriages every day, and it would at least show Mayrose that all men did not slight her as he did. Therein was a piece of feminine reasoning ineradicable from hearts that have been despised. No girl, however loving, however gentle and patient, will, if she have any spirit, sit down tamely under disdain.

So when Lord Hornette arrived, gracefully dressed, and bearing a huge bouquet to help him in his wooing, he found Zellie ready to hear what he had to say. She did not show him a melancholy face either, but, though a little pale, was friendly and smiling, for she had too much tact to play the victim before a man whom she was about to accept as a husband.

Enchanted with her greeting, Lord Hornette made no preface before venturing on his prayer:

“This will be a day I shall remember all my life,

Lady Azalea," he said, handing her the bouquet. "I have come, with Lord Rosemary's leave, to ask you whether you will bestow on me a happiness——"

She interrupted him with a very sweet and modest look.

"Thank you, Lord Hornette; mamma has told me what you are going to ask, and I suppose she has prepared you for the way in which I should reply? There ought to be no secrets between us."

"There are none, Lady Azalea."

"You know that I will try to do my duty as your wife, but that you must bear with me if I do not seem all that you have a right to expect."

"I know, Lady Azalea, that an old proverb says that 'In every union there is one person who loves while the other allows himself, or herself, to be loved.' I am content to enjoy the bliss of loving you in the hope that some day, when you have seen how constant will be my efforts to make you happy, you will requite a little part of the devotion I now lay at your feet."

"And you will never regret your generosity?"

"I will live with the daily ambition of making you never regret that you accepted me."

"Oh, if you could only be happy, Lord Hornette!"

"My happiness will be in your hands, Azalea, even more than yours in mine," he said in an earnest tone.

He spoke so chivalrously and well that her eyes filled with tears, and she held out to him her hand.

He raised it to his lips, then encircled her with his arm and kissed her. And so they were betrothed.

It was a little mortifying to a future Duke of Bumblebeigh that his bride should have another image than his in her heart; but even dukes, when in love, have sometimes to put up with these unpleasantnesses, and Lord Hornette felt that marriage would right all past balances in his favour. He had carried his courtship through with a determined hand; had met with opposition and brushed it aside, which was just what he liked, and he could afford to feel elated.

He stayed to luncheon, and when Violet came in she perceived by the glow on his features that he had succeeded. She clapped her hands, for Mayrose's conduct seemed to her to have been so abominable as to beggar the vocabulary of blame, and she hated and despised him for it.

"Oh, I am so glad, Zellie!" she cried, throwing her arms round her sister's neck. "You won't look miserable any more, eh, darling? But, Hornette, you are going to be my brother now, so I may kiss you too;" and she did kiss him very heartily on both cheeks.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Grace Marvell's Petition.

"I WILL certainly have this case inquired into, Miss Marvell."

"I felt certain I could rely on your kindness."

"Say only on my sense of duty."

"I am not sure it is a duty to right an injured man. You will have to contend against much opposition, and perhaps make yourself enemies."

"Be sure that would not daunt me, Miss Marvell," said Mayrose, firmly; "but if you will allow me I will call on Mr. Marvell and hear the facts from his own lips. I could go with you now, for I have time to spare, and there may as well be as little delay as possible in investigating a case of such hardship."

"Oh, Lord Mayrose, we live in such dreadfully shabby rooms," exclaimed Grace, reddening; but the proposal evidently did not displease her, for she rose to accept it, even as her lips refused.

She had called at the Australia Office, as arranged with Leech; and Mayrose had received her with respectful friendliness in memory of the old times when he had known her happy and contented. He also felt a twofold interest in the grievance which she came to

lay before him—first, the chivalrous interest which any man must experience when an attractive girl comes to him as a suppliant to plead an injured father's wrongs; and secondly, a professional interest in an alleged act of injustice perpetrated by a department in which he now had authority.

But Grace Marvell was accustomed to excite something more than interest in those who beheld her. She had never talked to a man without seeing him fascinated, and Mayrose's composed manner by contrast seemed cold. Was it this that lent an animation to her tone and language—a sort of coquetry to her glance? Did she remember that old-time episode of the glove at Naples, when for a day or two it had looked as though young Lord Mayrose meant to woo her? To be sure he had gone away before the affair had exceeded the limits of a flirtation, but girls have retentive memories, and perhaps Grace's chance meeting with Mayrose at Springfield had put into her mind some of those thoughts which were uppermost when she had declared to poor Quilpin Leech that she would marry none save a man of wealth or rank.

Alas for her! she had come to Mayrose in an unpropitious moment, for he had heard that morning that Lord Hornette had proposed to Zellie Carol the day before and been accepted.

He had been prepared for this, but a blow falls little less hard for being expected. Some secret hope had possessed him that Lord Hornette's suit might yet fail; but now all hope was gone; and while Grace was

chafing at the little admiration which her presence seemed to excite, Mayrose was musing that he should have to go through the misery of calling at Rosemary House to offer his congratulations. Grace Marvell was not the kind of woman whose beauty could divert a grieving lover from his wretched thoughts. She was too stately and ungenial—like a beautiful image, she was all outward fairness and no heart.

Mayrose stood up to touch the bell, and when the messenger appeared requested that Mr. Leech might be called. Grace was disappointed. She had not counted that Quilpin would be summoned to break the *tête-à-tête* and play propriety; and she turned away to hide her chagrin. Quilpin Leech, however, chanced to be out, and it was Mr. Keane-Midge who entered.

"I think your secretary has gone over to the Waste Paper Office," began this venerable functionary; but noticing Grace Marvell, who was known to him, he paused and stammered: "I beg your pardon, I am intruding."

"I have come to pray Lord Mayrose for redress of my father's wrongs," said Grace, confronting Mr. Marvell's persecutor with a flushed face. "His lordship is the first in this office who has deigned to give us a hearing."

"This is very painful," answered Mr. Keane-Midge, deprecatingly. "Much as it grieves me to contradict a lady, I must repeat that Mr. Marvell's case has been

carefully investigated and that there is no reversing the decision at which we have most reluctantly arrived."

"You say that because you are afraid lest your injustice should be exposed and punished," said Grace, tauntingly.

"There has been no injustice, Miss Marvell."

"There has been not only injustice, but cruelty so base that if I were a man you would not stand and brave me like this. But I see your conscience is unquiet, Mr. Midge. You have grown pale, for you know that Lord Mayrose will not become the tool of your private enmities. He has a spirit above such wickedness as yours."

"I can make every allowance for the compassion which must be aroused for Mr. Marvell's case when argued by your lips," answered Mr. Keane-Midge who, in effect, had paled during Grace's denunciation, but spoke collectedly and with irony. "Lord Mayrose, however, though new to office, is already aware that his prerogatives do not extend to annulling the decisions of secretaries of state."

If Mr. Midge had not said this, Mayrose would have blamed Grace's violence, but the old official's covert sneer at the influence of a pretty face, and his allusion to Mayrose's newness provoked the latter.

"I will decide for myself whether an injustice has been committed," he said drily—"and if there has been it can never be too late to remedy it."

With these words he took up his hat, offered Grace his arm, and escorted her down the staircase.

It was awkward to him to have to ride to Surrey Street, alone with a young lady, but as Quilpin was absent there was no help for it. A cab was fetched, and when they had started Grace made the situation more difficult by beginning to cry, declaring it was worse than death to her to have to put up with the indignities of Mr. Midge's affronts.

A man feels helpless when a woman cries before him, whom he has no right to console after those affectionate methods by which alone women can be consoled; and Mayrose asked himself whether he had not done wrong in embarking upon an adventure which, if it led to nothing, might expose him to many more trying scenes than this. He murmured a few words of hope, and thought he was conveying comfort by adding, that if matters came to the worse he would not suffer Mr. Marvell to want, and would bestir himself to obtain for Grace herself a more suitable position than that of school-mistress. In the meantime he placed Springfield at her disposal if she and her father would like to reside there for a few months.

But there was not in his tone that which Grace would probably have liked to find there, for at his offer she raised her head with dignity and dried her eyes:

"Thank you, Lord Mayrose, you are very kind, but we could not think of accepting your proposals.

We have appealed to your sense of justice, not to your charity."

They turned into Surrey Street as she said this, and their progress up to Mrs. Legges' door was soon barred by a coach, which proved to be Sir Ham Pennywon's. It was evident Mary had called, and Grace was glad of it, for she would not have to leave the peer alone while she went up to make her father tidy, and otherwise prepare him for this important visit. Mayrose, not recognising the coach as Sir Ham's, was taken aback when on being ushered into the shabby parlour, he saw Mary.

She had been writing a note to Grace, and rose, pen in hand, but as Mayrose entered before Grace, the look of welcome vanished from her face.

"Good morning," she murmured coldly in answer to Mayrose's bow.

"Mary, Lord Mayrose has been kind enough to come and enquire about papa's case," explained Grace, kissing her friend. "You will not mind if I leave you here whilst I go upstairs."

"I think I will go with you," said Mary, moving.

"No, dear, please stay here. Papa may grow unmanageable if I am not by myself." It was impossible to insist, so Mary stayed; and she and Mayrose remained together.

They had not met after the camelia episode in the conservatory, and since then Mayrose had been embittered against the Pennywons by Sir Ham's various injudicious attempts to thrust himself upon him.

Mary, yielding to who knows what secret feeling, had come to think severely of Mayrose, because of his alleged behaviour about Zellie Carol. Abel Dexter had told her that the peer was going to marry Lady Azalea for her money; and since then, her father—informed by Mr. Dexter—had mentioned that the match had been broken off for the very reason that it was only a money-match, and that Lady Azalea's parents did not consider Mayrose rich enough. All this seemed terribly sordid and unworthy in Mary's eyes; and she blushed for a man—a nobleman—who could place himself in a predicament of such ignominy. But why did she trouble herself about the conduct of a man who ought to have been perfectly indifferent to her? Ah! why? Perhaps she scarcely knew herself.

When Mary was angry with anyone, the expression on her face was almost comical. All her limbs, and all her features except her eyes, were diminutive. She had the daintiest hands and feet, a tiny mouth, and quiet, melodious voice; but her large eyes, in moods of displeasure, opened wondrously, and the look in them was not one of irritation but of astonishment. This was made the more curious by the coolly deliberate neatness which Mary displayed in doing whatever she had in hand, as though her astonishment left her complete mastery over her faculties.

To give herself a countenance after Grace had retired, she proceeded to arrange her writing materials methodically. She closed the blotting-book and ink-

stand, wiped the pen on a piece of paper—there being no wiper—and dropped the paper into the grate. Then she took up her black gloves which she had neatly folded before writing, and began to draw them on.

Mayrose watched all this with some amusement at her pretty manners, and admiration for her sweet, candid face, and he kept silent till the silence felt strange. As it was his duty to speak first, he did so:

“I hope we shall be able to do something for Mr. Marvell, Miss Pennywon. I hear you take an interest in his case.”

“Everybody must feel interested in such undeserved misfortunes,” answered Mary tranquilly; “but as you are good enough to examine the case, I suppose everything will come right.”

“I trust so, but it is often easier to bring about misfortunes than to remedy them.”

“Why so?”

“Because such misfortunes as this are often due to abuses which are supported——”

“By powerful people?”

“Yes,” said Mayrose, not guessing whither she was leading him.

“Ah! I understand, and the powerful people might place you between the alternative of condoning a wrong or resigning your salary,” said Mary with placid sarcasm.

Mayrose reddened. Could this city knight's daughter really intend to twit him? and if so, was it

in fun or hostile malice? He glanced at Mary's astonished face, but was unable to detect whether she had spoken in innocence or premeditated irony.

"I suppose I must accept your remark jokingly," he said smiling, but with constraint; "I hope you do not think that a salary would tempt me to condone anything of which I disapproved?"

"I do not think you would act worse than other people, Lord Mayrose," said Mary, who seemed unconscious that she had gone too far. "Perhaps though, a salary sometimes confuses peoples' notions of right and wrong."

"What unkind philosophy! Who taught it you?"

"Nobody. I learned it."

"I am afraid then I must have offended you to make you speak so like an enemy?"

"Oh, I am not your enemy, Lord Mayrose, but if I were I should only be repaying your hostility to papa," answered Mary a little bitterly. "You do not seem to be very fond of my father, judging by the way in which you tried to prevent his being elected to Parliament."

"That is the cause of your aggressiveness then?" smiled Mayrose, rather relieved than embarrassed by her reproach. "Well, I admit my conduct may have been unneighbourly, but I must remind you that I was placed there between what I considered a duty and an interest, and you will admit that I did not side with the rich and powerful man?"

Mary was beaten with her own weapons. She

bent her face over her glove, and was almost a minute buttoning it to hide her confusion.

"I repeat, neither my father, nor mamma, nor I, feel any soreness at what you did, Lord Mayrose," she murmured in a forced tone. "I was not thinking of that when I spoke."

Mayrose became serious again and wistful.

"Then you were thinking of something else? Tell me what I have done to give you such an evil opinion of me."

"Oh, my Lord, what can the opinion of a girl like me signify to you?"

Was it the red light shining through those red moire curtains which brought such a glow to Mayrose's face? But the light would not have accounted for the expression of pain that settled on his brow.

"Your good opinion signifies much to me, Miss Pennywon," he said, not knowing how grave and distinct his voice sounded in that silent room. "Unintentionally, no doubt, you have wounded me. I have lately had sorrow to endure, and that may have made me sensitive; but I assure you I should feel grieved if I had done anything that could justify unkind words on your part."

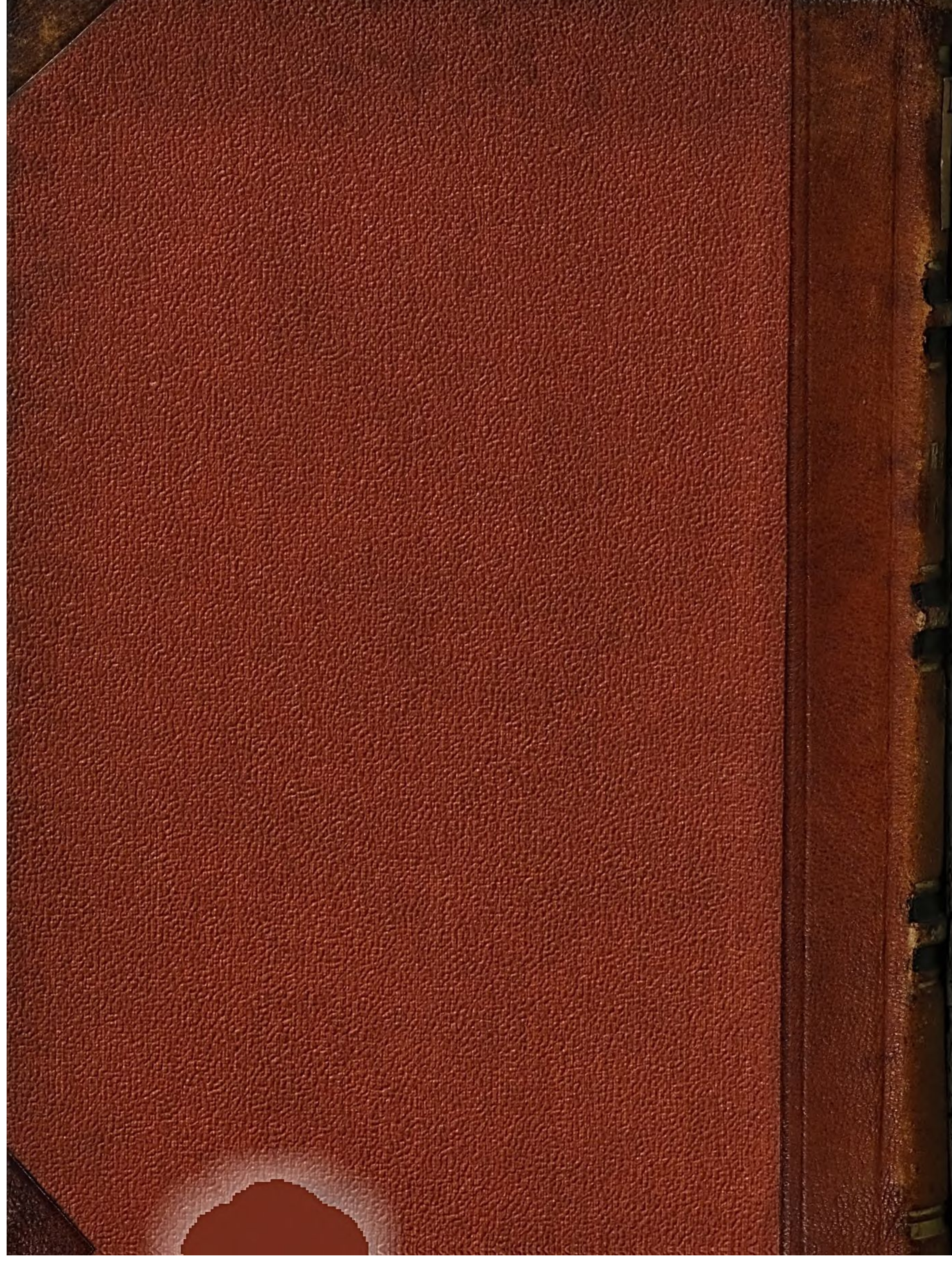
"I beg your pardon, I didn't mean,"—faltering Mary—and was it the curtain again? but her face was scarlet and two tears, welling out of brimming eyes, trickled down her cheeks.

There were steps in the passage, the door opened, and Grace returned. She stood still a moment at

seeing Mary, with face averted, passing her handkerchief over her eyes, and Mayrose looking pale as he pretended to glance at his watch. She bit her lips, and, maybe, repented having left them alone.

END OF BOOK I.

Andr. Less
Buchbinder
Hamburg



Murray, Eustace Clare Grenville

The Boudoir Cabal in 3 volumes

Bd.: 1

Leipzig 1875

Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek -- L.angl.o.182-b(1
urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11716241-9